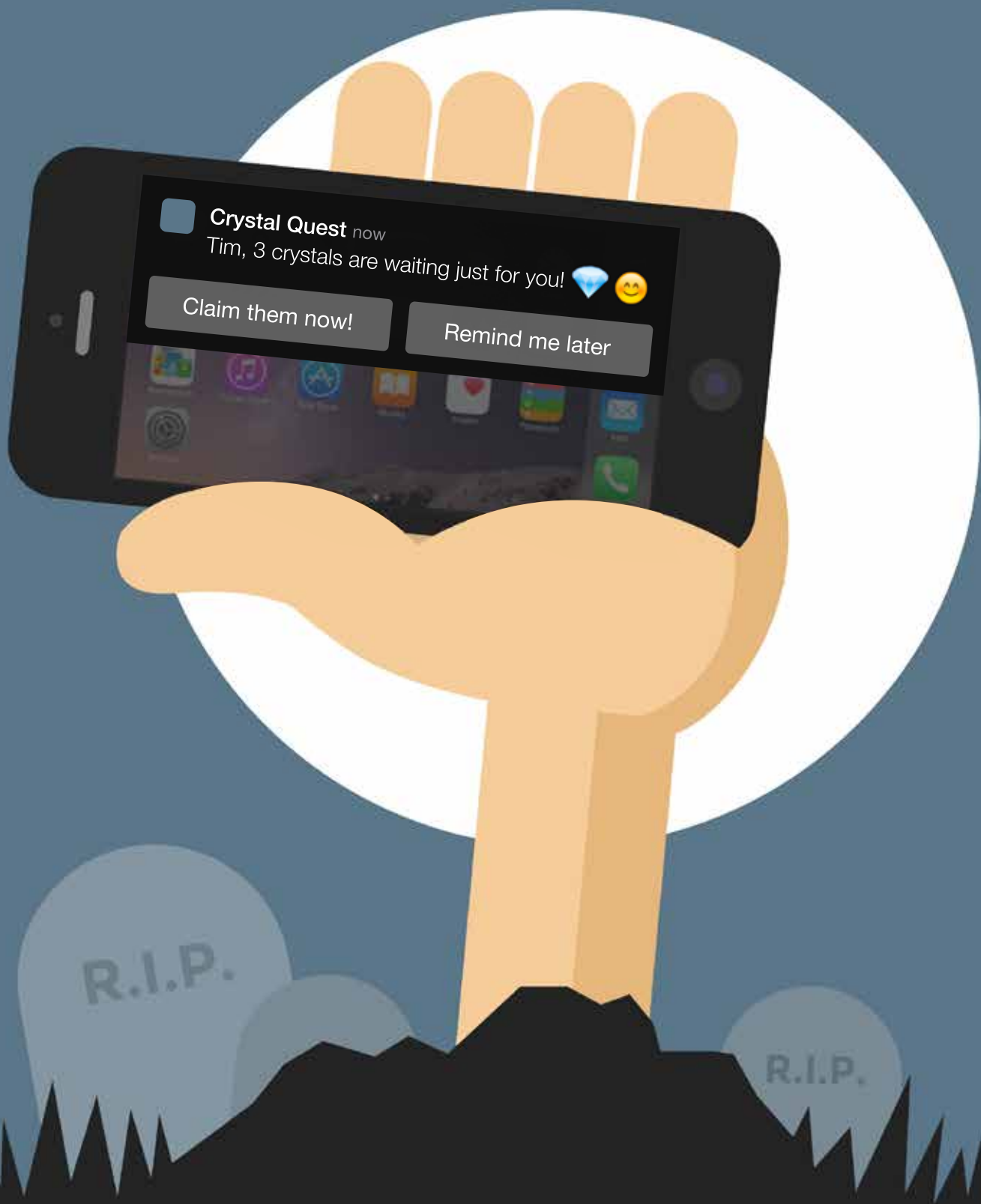


# casual connect



CASUAL GAMES  
ASSOCIATION

Fall 2014



The world's leading gaming companies use Appoxee  
to wake their dormant users from the dead

**Appoxee**<sup>1</sup>

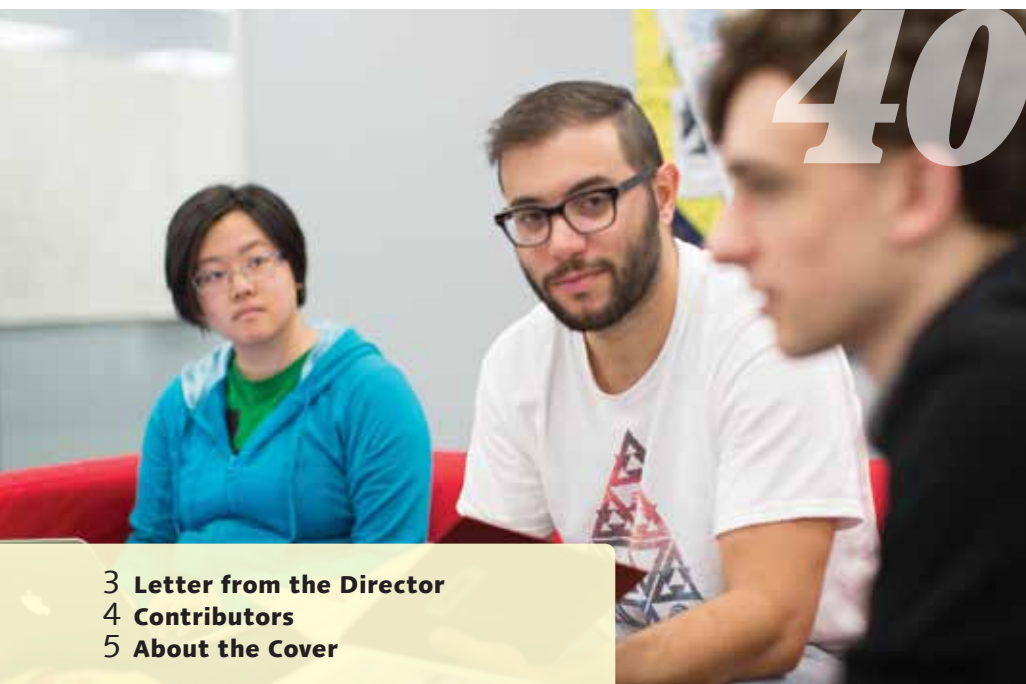
Mobile Marketing  
Automation

[www.appoxee.com](http://www.appoxee.com)



# Contents

Casual Connect | Fall 2014



- 3 Letter from the Director
- 4 Contributors
- 5 About the Cover

## COLUMNS

- 6 **POSTMORTEM**  
**A Break from Reality**  
The Making of *Bottom Feeders*  
by David Kern and Russ Phillips
- 12 **INFOGRAPHIC**  
**Gaming: The Lingua Franca of Mobile**
- 14 **A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS**  
**How to Build a Dungeon**  
From *Dungeon Defenders* to *Dungeon Defenders II*
- 20 **INDIE CORNER**  
**UK Developers Take on LA Cops**  
A Different Sort of Modern Dream  
by Oliver Clarke
- 24 **EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
**Family-centric Fun and Development**  
An Interview with Josef Hall
- 30 **STUDIO SPOTLIGHT**  
**FlowPlay**
- 60 **NOW WE ARE TALKING**  
**Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft**

## FEATURES

- [industry]**  
34 **Game Changers**  
**Four Game Development Entrepreneurs Who Are Helping to Shape the Industry**
- [working with brands]**  
40 **Giving 800 Percent**  
**The Rise of Glitchsoft**
- [mobile]**  
46 **Can Live Competitive Gaming Thrive on Mobile?**  
**Core Mobile eSports**  
by Jan Wagner
- [HTML5]**  
52 **What Are You Waiting For?**  
**New Alternatives for Mobile Game Discovery and Monetization**  
by Rob Grossberg
- [industry veterans]**  
56 **Gaming Through Decades**  
**The History of Wayforward Technologies**

## PUBLISHER & EDITOR IN CHIEF

Jessica Tams

## CONTENT PRODUCTION MANAGER

Yulia Vakhrusheva

## EDITORS

Peter Watkins, Nicholas Yanes

## CREATIVE DIRECTOR & DESIGNER

Shirin Ardakani

## CONTRIBUTORS

Cherie Liu, David Kern, Russ Phillips, Oliver Clarke, Rob Grossberg, Jan Wagner

## CONTACT US

### Advertising Sales:

Lea Marie Hester, [lea@casualconnect.org](mailto:lea@casualconnect.org)

### Address Changes and Subscription:

Julie Fridal, [julie@casualconnect.org](mailto:julie@casualconnect.org)

### Article Submission and Comments:

[editor@casualconnect.org](mailto:editor@casualconnect.org)

## TRADEMARKS

©2014 Casual Games Association. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part of this magazine is strictly prohibited. Casual Games Association, Casual Connect, the Casual Games Association logo and the Casual Connect logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Casual Games Association. All other product and company names mentioned herein may be trademarks of their respective owners.

## DISCLOSURES

The Casual Games Association's ("CGA") Casual Connect Magazine ("Magazine") is for informational purposes only. The Magazine contains current opinions and estimates which may change at any time. Furthermore, the CGA does not warrant or guarantee statements made by authors of articles in the Magazine. Information in the Magazine should not be used as the sole basis for any investment or strategy decisions. While the information included in the Magazine is derived from reliable sources, the reader is responsible for verification of information enclosed in this Magazine and the CGA does not guarantee or

warrant the accuracy or completeness of the information. The CGA is not responsible for oversights in opinions or data.

Because of the position of the CGA in the casual games community, nearly all companies listed in this Magazine have contributed funds or services to the CGA in exchange for educational, promotional and marketing services.

## USAGE

Companies inside of the entertainment business may use information in this magazine for internal purposes and with partners and/or potential partners. Members of the press may quote the Magazine.

Casual Connect Magazine (<http://casualconnect.org/magazine-archive/>) is published three times yearly by the Casual Games Association (<http://www.casualgamesassociation.org/>), P.O. Box 305 Smithfield, UT 84335. Casual Connect Magazine is postal mailed to over 17,000 game industry professionals and members of the press.

Have a great app but need a publisher?  
Have the concept and design,  
yet still looking for a game mechanism?



TabTale  
is looking  
for you!



App Annie

On August 28th 2013  
AppAnnie announced  
that children's app  
publisher TabTale  
was the 7th most  
downloaded publisher  
in iOS App Stores



Scan the QR code on the left  
or email us for more information:  
[Publishers@tabtale.com](mailto:Publishers@tabtale.com)

For other business inquiries  
scan the QR code on the right  
or email to [Business@tabtale.com](mailto:Business@tabtale.com)





# Letter from the Director



**W**ith the help of the Eastern European games community, we launched our very first event in Kyiv in 2006. After eight great years in Kyiv, we now enter Belgrade, the up-and-coming, energetic, open capital of Serbia.

While it seems that so much has changed over the last eight years, the truly important components of our industry have remained the same: We're a friendly, hard-working bunch who have the honor of working in the most rapidly-changing, creative media ever known.

Three years ago, in an attempt to focus our efforts on what truly matters in casual games, we surveyed a representative sample of the worldwide games industry, including both men and women in the casual and core industries. We never broadly published the results, but I would now like to share one of our most important findings: The casual games industry is an awesome place to work! Of particular note at this time is the fact that, compared to other sectors in the games industry, women in casual games are happier with their co-workers, their bosses, and with the treatment of women in the industry. This is especially true of women working at companies whose sole focus is casual games.

While this should come as no surprise to anyone who has worked in casual games, it makes me proud to be a part of this fabulous industry.

In the last year, many of our colleagues have faced threats of violence, bombings, sanctions, and natural disasters, with family members being driven from their homes—and worse. Focusing on negative events can often lead us into a spiral of depression and helplessness, so please take some time during the conference to read the inspirational stories of four fabulous independent game developers from Sweden, India, Taiwan, and Singapore. Their stories are an important reminder that no matter what the world throws at us, we must stand tall and face adversity with determination and dignity. May we never let the actions of others distract us from realizing our dreams.

*Jenica*

Jessica Tams, *Director of the Casual Games Association*  
[jessica@casualconnect.org](mailto:jessica@casualconnect.org)

## EVENT CALENDAR

**10–12 November 2014**

**Casual Connect Eastern Europe in Belgrade**

Crowne Plaza Belgrade  
Vladimira Popovica  
10 Beograd  
Belgrade, 11070  
Serbia



**4–6 February 2015**

**Casual Connect Europe**

Beurs van Berlage  
Damrak 243  
1012 ZJ, Amsterdam  
Netherlands



**19–21 May 2015**

**Casual Connect Asia in Singapore**

Shangri-La Hotel  
22 Orange Grove Road  
258350, Singapore



**11–13 August 2015**

**Casual Connect USA in San Francisco**

Hilton San Francisco  
Union Square  
333 O'Farrell St.,  
San Francisco, CA  
94102



# Contributors



**David Kern**

**david.kern@casualconnect.org**

David CEO – Technical Director for nobodinos. Previously he was at Zipper Interactive working behind the scenes as a technical artist on over 17 games, including *Recoil*, *Top Gun*, *MechWarrior3*, *Crimson Skies* and the entire *SOCOM* series—plus *MAG* and *Unit13*. At nobodinos, he writes creative code, animates, models, and runs the business.

**Redmond, WA**

**Russ Phillips**

**russ.phillips@casualconnect.org**

Russ was Art Director for *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*. He has developed games such as *Recoil*, *Crimson Skies*, *Mechwarrior*, *SOCOM*, *MAG* and *Unit 13*. Russ has a total of 17 shipped titles in his career. Currently Russ is helping to create his vision in *Bottom Feeders* and holds the position of Art Director at nobodinos, llc.

**Redmond, WA**



**FlowPlay**  
Seattle, WA

**Glitchsoft**  
Kanata, ON

**Blizzard Entertainment**  
Irvine, CA

**Flurry Analytics**  
San Francisco, CA

**Concept Art House**  
San Francisco, CA

**WayForward Technologies**  
Valencia, CA

**KingsIsle Entertainment**  
Austin, TX

**Trendy Entertainment**  
Gainesville, FL



**Rob Grossberg**

**rob.grossberg@casualconnect.org**

Rob is the CEO of TreSensa, Inc., a NYC-based HTML5 game distribution and monetization company that optimizes games for the mobile web. Rob has a digital marketing background, first as Deputy General Counsel and VP of Sales Operations at DoubleClick, and then as SVP of Operations & Strategy at Tremor Video. Rob co-founded TreSensa in 2011.

**New York, NY**

**Nicholas Yanes**

**nicholas.yanes@casualconnect.org**

Nicholas just received his PhD degree in American Studies from the University of Iowa. His professional and academic interests are Early US History, Contemporary Popular Culture, and the Industries of Popular Entertainment - specifically, comic books, movies & video games.

**Iowa City, IA**



# About the Cover



**Jan Wagner**  
[jan.wagner@casualconnect.org](mailto:jan.wagner@casualconnect.org)

Jan Wagner is the co-founder of Cliffhanger Productions Games. He has worked on titles such as *Warcraft 3*, *SpellForce 2* and *Half Life 1* in various capacities from QA to producing and product management. He was a professor at Darmstadt University and sits on various juries for industry awards. Jan has been in the industry for over 20 years and feels slightly old.

**Vienna, Austria**

**Oliver Clarke**  
[oliver.clarke@casualconnect.org](mailto:oliver.clarke@casualconnect.org)

Oliver is a game developer who loves to make and play games. As Leader of Modern Dream, he directed the successful production of the new edition of the cult classic *The Typing of the Dead* for SEGA. In 12 years of game development he's credited with over 12 game titles released. He aims to be recognized for producing fun, playable game concepts that are financially successful, memorable, and deliver emotional gaming experiences.

**Coventry, UK**



**Cherie Liu**

*In an ancient forest, the monsters suffer from insomnia. Red Fairy Namu, the kindest monster, travels a long distance to bring them to the Dream Land, where there's a Sleepy White Mushroom—which has the most comfortable surface—and The Dreamer, a hypnotist monster. Now all of the monsters can sleep and have pleasant dreams.*

Cherie Liu of Concept Art House was born and raised in mid-southern China. She graduated from Nanchang University of China with a degree in Fine Art.

Cherie has loved children's book illustration since she was a kid. She admires work by Chihiro Iwasaki and Mo Willems. Her favorite subject matter is little cute monsters and creatures, which perhaps explains why she likes to play games that have all kinds of monsters, such as *My Singing Monsters*. She also likes to play puzzle adventure games. *Machinarium*, *Monument Valley* and *Journey* are some of her favorites.

As a production artist for social/mobile games Cherie has worked on a variety of title, including *Country Story*, *Tap Pet Hotel*, *Dessert Shop*, *Flower Shop*, *Ninja Royal*, *Dragon Story*, and *Monster Tracker*. The tools she uses most are Adobe Photoshop CS6, Illustrator CS6, pencil, and watercolor. She hopes to become a professional children's book illustrator one day.



# Postmortem

## A Break from Reality

### The Making of *Bottom Feeders*

**W**hen SONY closed Zipper Interactive in April of 2012, the two of us didn't skip a beat. We immediately set out to create a simple, casual game for the mass market. We had worked together at Zipper since its inception (Russ as Art Director and David as Principal Technical Artist), but at the time we were probably best known for our work on the *SOCOM* series for PlayStation2, PlayStation3 and PSP.

After working on gritty, first-person shooters for so many years, it was our desire to make something fun and lighthearted. We wanted to create something that wasn't rated "mature" with more general audience appeal. Moving away from what we knew how to do and jumping into the over-saturated mobile market was very intimidating, but we knew a break from reality was what we needed. So after Zipper closed, we formed nobodinos (because "nobody knows" what the next big hit will be) and started to prototype what would eventually become *Bottom Feeders*.

#### Off and Sailing

The idea popped into Russ's head one night—just like any other of the hundreds of ideas that come up, get written down and quickly



Moving away from what we knew how to do and jumping into the over-saturated mobile market was very intimidating, but we knew a break from reality was what we needed.



disappear into a sub-folder named "awesome\_game\_ideas." But, this idea stuck: Base a game off of a concept that you are familiar with (check!). Make it fun and keep it simple (check, check!). Russ

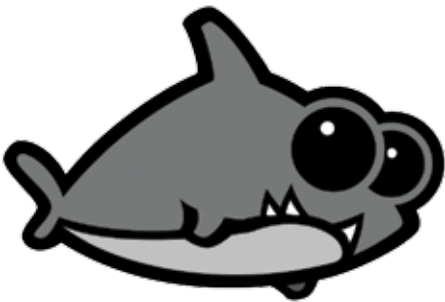
had spent many years crabbing and fishing in the waters around Seattle. There is nothing more fun than dropping a net, waiting a while and pulling up a mountain of fresh crab. But wait, we knew we couldn't expect people to sit around and wait for crab to come to them—we needed a different dynamic, where the player has to actually catch those critters



by David Kern, CEO, Technical Director  
and Russ Phillips, Art Director; nobodinos;  
Redmond, WA

running around on the sea floor. Russ pulled out his laptop and quickly put together a little animation showing the sea floor scrolling by to illustrate his idea: a simple side-scroller in which you catch critters by swiping your finger, dropping a net, and then hauling them back up to the boat.

Sounds simple, right? Well, it wasn't at all as simple as it sounds. The research started and many questions came to the surface. The net is essentially your weapon—so it had to be powerful. It needed to catch stuff, break stuff, cause chain reaction events to happen



and it had to be easy to control. Oh, and it had to act and look like a net with a long rope, a buoy, and lines that attach it to the boat! This is where David and a lot of iteration got involved. The day Russ completed this conceptual animation, he started work on the prototype in Adobe Flash.

The first thing he built was a level editor that served as a prototype to build and play a few levels. Flash was working quite well at this stage of development, and though we had never intended to actually ship using Flash, after a while we were so invested in it that we decided to continue using it. We recruited a small team to help us out and met just once a week in a deli. This was a very difficult way to work as we missed out on the face-time that is really needed for close collaboration. By September, 2012, we had moved into an office, and by late November we had the game launched on Facebook. The decision to launch on the web was partly strategic and partly due to the ease with which we could get Flash running in a browser.

The launch wasn't as successful as we hoped, but we did get some good analytics from the game and a lot of user feedback on



The very first prototype we developed for the iPhone and iPad told us everything we needed to know: Touch was the way to go.

how to improve it. We launched a second version on Facebook in March, 2013, with many more levels and completely reworked art. We shrunk the graphics by 50% and added more variety to the levels. We even decided to change the way you collected Sandollars in post-game by adding a crate to fill and sell in the market. We had hoped this was the ticket to keeping players engaged as it took a few levels to fill the crate before you could sell it and collect your bounty. Still, after months of refining and reworking the levels, we could not get our DAU numbers up.

In the back of our minds we knew what the true problem was. The original game design and vision had always been to create a touch-based game that required taps and swipes to play. Our decision to build it for players using a mouse was the problem. It never really had “the feeling” we originally envisioned. Even though all of the pieces were there, it just wasn't as fun to point and click or click and pull as it should be. The very first prototype we developed for the iPhone and iPad told us everything we needed to know: Touch was the way to go.



# The Making of *Bottom Feeders*

It was time to refine a game that we knew was fun, and that meant taking a second look at what we'd already done. It was time to decide what to keep and what to eliminate in the mobile version.

## Let the Real Fun Begin

It was time to swallow our pride, cut our losses, and start on the mobile version. Although we had a major setback, this didn't turn out to be a "back to the drawing board" type problem. We still had a great concept, good art direction, and a document full of feedback from our Facebook version that we could use to focus our efforts on the mobile version. At that time we also made the choice to abandon Flash because even with Air it would not run well enough on mobile devices. So we switched to using MOAI for all development. This meant



we had to rewrite the entire game in a different language.

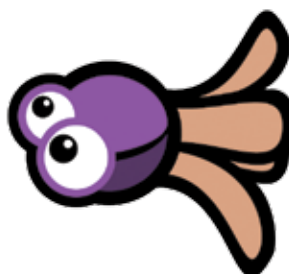
It was time to refine a game that we knew was fun, and that meant taking a second look at what we'd already done. It was time to decide what to keep and what to eliminate in the mobile version.

We started by rethinking the net. As we developed the connection from the net to the boat, we decided the net needed to be more

powerful. We built a system that would allow you to simply touch the power-up you wanted and automatically place it in the net for immediate use. To add to the fun, we allowed the player to add all three power-ups at once, each power-up causing its own unique influence on the net. Bait acted like a magnet that would attract crabs (Scrubbies) to your net, while Dynamite caused an explosion, giving you points for everything in the area. We also implemented a Gold Net that would protect from enemies while allowing you to break through wood blocks to get to hidden critters.

Still, we knew that a powerful net was not enough—that just picking up crabs, fish, and squid for hours on end would get boring. So we introduced a variety of dynamic puzzles to free the critters and make them available to catch, including falling logs, rolling rocks, swinging pendulums, and springboards that send things flying. We also enabled players to upgrade their boat, captain, and other equipment to enhance the game experience and unlock new ways to solve puzzles throughout the game.

One of the last features we added was deep trenches you can fish in. This created a whole new dimension to the game by allowing you to anchor the







As we refined the shape of our character design, we even considered the possibility that they might become plush or plastic toys someday.

game. Coming from years of creating realistic war games, it was a challenge to switch gears. Although we both have extensive backgrounds in 3D realistic worlds, the chance to use our 2D art and drawing skills was very exciting.

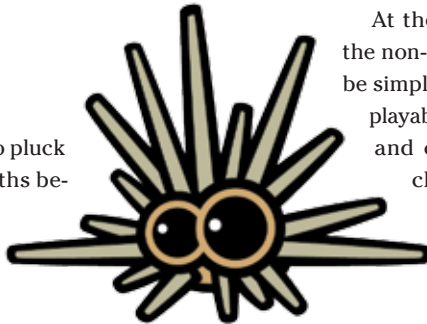
Our first goal was to create layers of an undersea environment that moved at different speeds to get that parallax perspective. To break up the look between areas you fish in, we put together groups of rocks, seaweed and coral that set the mood. From the dark, murky waters of Grunt Gulch to the colorful depths of Coral Cove, there's a unique look throughout the entire game.

At the same time we wanted the non-playable environment to be simple and uncluttered so the playable area remained obvious and clear to the player. We chose to use darker outlines on the objects you

can interact with while the background objects had little or none to reduce contrast. On top of the environment we needed to separate the characters, enemies, and objects you want to interact with to cause events. Brighter solid colors were used with a few frames of looping animation for movement for our characters. Adding a transparent layer of color and giving the background a progressive blur helped the objects you interact with pop.

Our characters are the stars of the show. Developing each character was not only fun, it became an obsession. The main character's form had to be flexible and work for many situations. It had to be easy to identify on a small screen, easy to animate, with a sense of personality. As we refined the shape of our character design, we even considered the possibility that they might become plush or plastic toys someday. Our characters went through many iterations but ultimately, we ended up

boat and take some time to pluck every critter from the depths below. As the anchor drops, the camera pans down to a whole new area to fish in!



You can see all of these enhancements in today's version of the game. It starts out very easy, but progressively gets more difficult, requiring a skilled touch, timing and combinations of power-ups to succeed. As you progress through the game, you find that the levels contain more opportunities to catch creatures, but at the same time you need upgrades to catch and hold all the creatures: a bigger boat, a faster winch, a captain, an anchor, and fish-finding radar all become essential.

### Art and Color

The art in *Bottom Feeders* has undergone huge changes from prototype to completed mobile



# The Making of *Bottom Feeders*

with simple shapes and colors that we feel are very appealing.

## Development Under Pressure

When the summer of 2013 arrived, our desire to make the game better than ever led to a lot of feature creep (one of the many perils of game development). The fact is, good games don't happen overnight; sometimes a game simply requires careful iteration of design, art, and additional code to create a fun experience. We had completely redone the UI and game art, and we were adding many more new physics object types, creature behaviors, and levels.

The game was going a different direction from the original Flash game, and we were forced to rewrite our game-level editor to run under MOAI so that we could rebuild every level.

By the end of December, 2013 we were running low on capital, so unfortunately we had to let our last developer go. Development with just two people is a challenge, but it is still lots of fun—especially when you have worked with that person for years; there is a synergy

You can see all of these enhancements in today's version of the game. It starts out very easy, but progressively gets more difficult, requiring a skilled touch, timing and combinations of power-ups to succeed.



of ideas that come together quickly and forms some great content!

At that point, the game seemed close to complete, but it still needed a lot of iteration. The levels were not paced very well, and the game-play progression balance was off. We were also looking for ways to add some long-term player incentives to keep players playing. Our solution: We decided to add an aquarium collectible feature—something we had discussed a long time before but had never found the time to do.

Before we knew it, the spring of 2014 had arrived and we still had lots of levels to polish and game-play to balance. We also had a lot of 3D modeling to do, a 3D content pipeline to develop, and an animation system to implement. As if that weren't enough, we decided to include 50 achievements into Game Center for iOS and Play Services for Android. That meant making another 50 icons and a new "reward" section for the UI—which also meant a new UI path that had to be debugged.

The month of July, 2014 was our final push. We had friends testing builds for us on TestFlight and Google Play and got some early analytics to

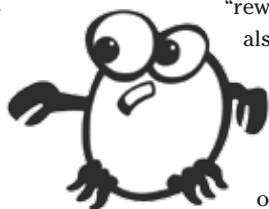
tweak some levels. Plus we were fixing bugs and memory leaks, which took another few weeks to track down. We submitted to the Apple App Store at the end of that month, at which point we both took a little vacation

*Bottom Feeders* was accepted for distribution in mid-August. It had been a long fun process, and we felt a huge sense of accomplishment to have it accepted in the store. Finally it was time to press the Publish button.

## What Does the Future Hold?

Future plans to expand the game are coming soon. The ocean offers a lot of strange and bizarre creatures for inspiration, so we plan to add more thematic worlds, new creatures and new puzzle objects in the next release. We may also include the level builder, at least for the tablet market. Players will be able to submit levels and have them vetted by their peers!

The whole process of making *Bottom Feeders* has been great fun and a huge learning experience for both of us. Of course, we hope millions of other people will also enjoy fishing for *Bottom Feeders*! ✨





# Reach Millions of Players on iWin's Network

## HTML5 Games



## PC Download Games



**Contact the iWin Publishing Team**  
[Publishing@iwin.com](mailto:Publishing@iwin.com)



## Infographic

# Gaming: The Lingua Franca of Mobile

Centering on Android devices, Flurry Analytics examined data from sixty thousand devices to determine what types of games become popular in multiple countries.



ITALY



CHINA

UNITED  
KINGDOMSOUTH  
KOREA

INDIA

UNITED  
STATES

BRAZIL



RUSSIA



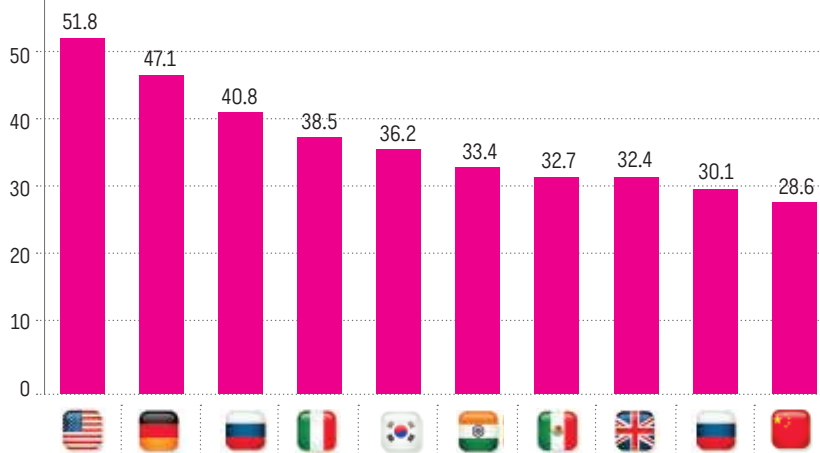
GERMANY



MEXICO

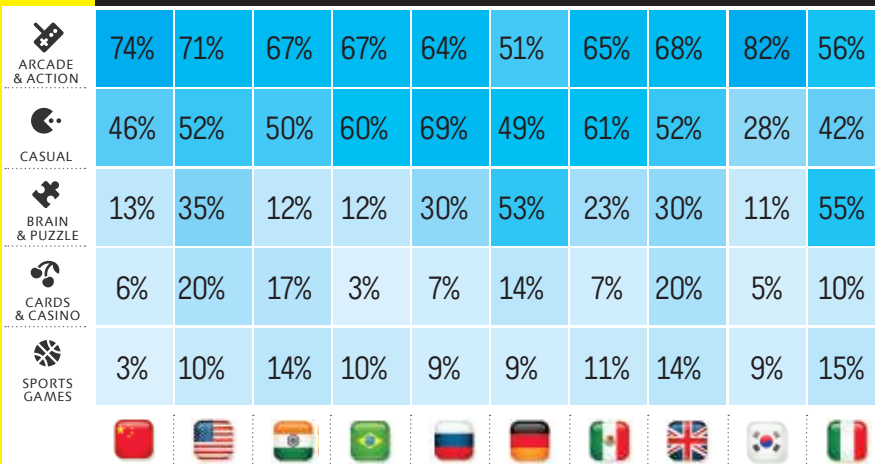
Charting the average amount of time spent playing games on Android devices across ten countries, Flurry showed that on a global level the average amount of game play is 37 minutes a day.

AVERAGE DAILY TIME SPENT IN ANDROID GAMES, BY COUNTRY (MINUTES)



Games that are in the Arcade & Action and Casual genres have the broadest appeal across all the nations surveyed.

PERCENTAGE OF ANDROID GAMERS BY CATEGORY





CASUAL



BRAIN &  
PUZZLE



CARDS &  
CASINO

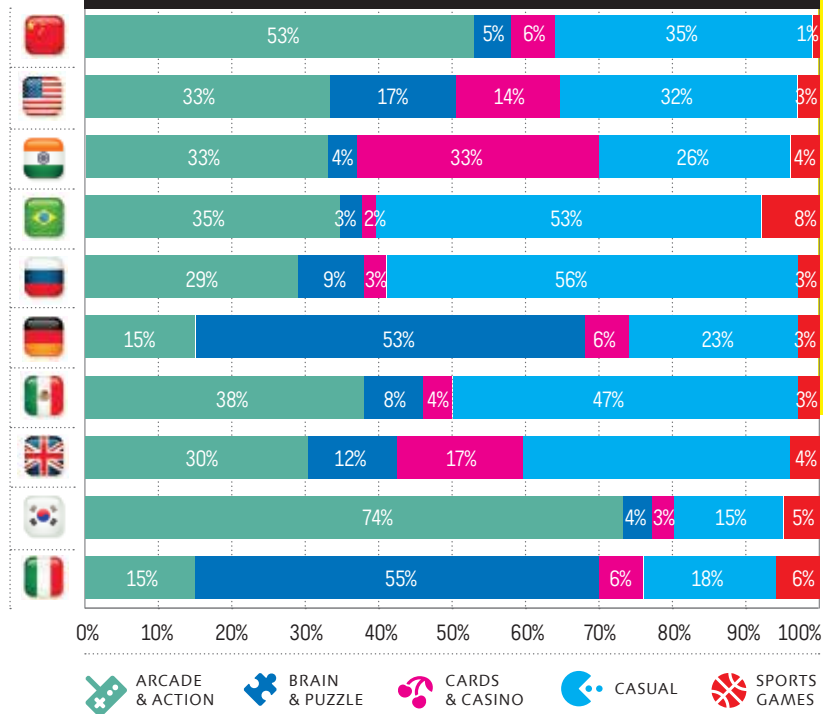


ARCADE  
& ACTION



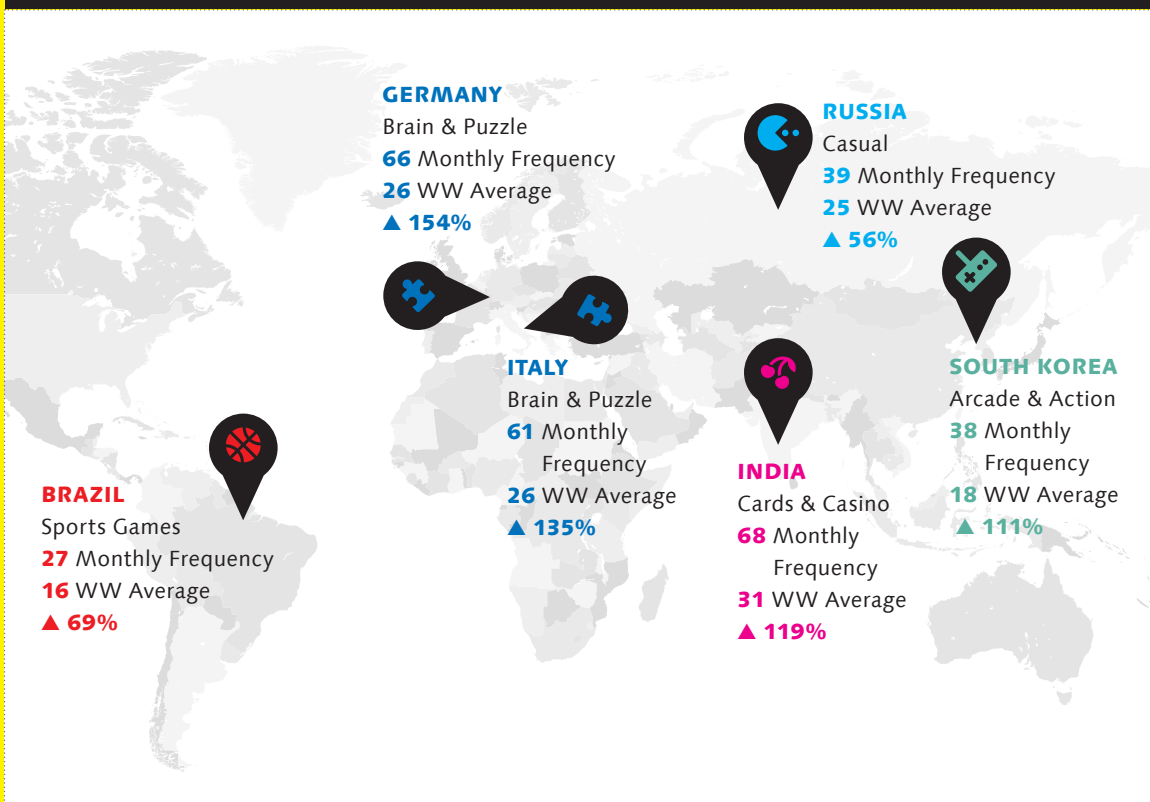
SPORTS  
GAMES

#### DISTRIBUTION OF ANDROID SESSIONS BY GAME CATEGORY



Placing all games into one of five categories—Arcade & Action, Brain & Puzzle, Cards & Casino, Casual, Sports Games—Flurry found that while each country's consumers have a unique choice of games, the Arcade & Action genre dominates the global Android game market.

#### AVERAGE MONTHLY ANDROID SESSION FREQUENCY IN TOP GAME CATEGORIES



In addition to each country's population typically being attracted to a distinct genre, Flurry found that the average of how many times a person engages an app in a month varies from nation to nation.

## A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

# How to Build a Dungeon From *Dungeon Defenders* to *Dungeon Defenders II*

**T**rendy Entertainment is a video game studio that has largely focused on the gaming franchise, *Dungeon Defenders*. So we just had to ask: How do you build a dungeon? Here's what the studio's Marketing Director, Philip Asher, told us.







## Building a Dungeon

While the studio's founders, Agapitus Lye and Jeremy Stieglitz, had been involved in computer programming for several years, Trendy Entertainment and the *Dungeon Defenders* franchise exist largely because Epic Games released the Unreal Development Kit for Unreal Engine 3 in 2009. In response to an inquiry from Epic, Lye and Stieglitz set out to show what the dev kit could do. Inspired by games like the original top-down *Legend of Zelda* and tower-defense games, the team aimed to create a strategy game with the action-oriented mechanics and RPG game-play popularized by video games like *Diablo*. And what they put together proved to be so compelling that they formed Trendy Entertainment so they could fully develop the game for market.

As Trendy Entertainment became a real studio, it quickly encountered the realities of working on a limited budget. For starters, they chose not to use realistic graphics because they just wouldn't be able to produce the quality needed to compete. That choice compelled the studio to go for what Asher describes as a "stylized, very bright with lots of saturation, 2D fantasy game, that in our minds was like a Saturday morning cartoon version of *Lord of the Rings*. The idea was that you play the children of the heroes, not the heroes themselves." As

such, the game's art style was highly influenced by Miyazaki's anime work, *The Hobbit* animated movie, and cartoons from the 1980s.

And it worked. So as the company grew from the success of *Dungeon Defenders*, Trendy turned to many of the artists who did contract work on the first game and hired them to full-time positions. It was a business decision that not only allowed Trendy to bring in full-time workers already familiar with the brand, but it allowed the studio to benefit from the improved skills of these artists. "In the first one," says Asher, "we compensated for a lack of skill on the art side with a lot of shaders and 2D tech to achieve the game's look. In the sequel we are actually able to get the desired style through the art itself."

# How to Build a Dungeon



## Creating a Cast of Characters

Like most indie game developers, Trendy Entertainment didn't have the financial ability to do market research when designing the characters for *Dungeon Defenders*. Asher says that when it came time to begin creating the characters, "the original idea for the first game was to hit the major archetypes that you'd need to balance a four-player co-op game: a tank character, a long-range character, a high-damage magic character, and a support character." They called them the Monk, the Huntress, the Apprentice, and the Squire.

Early on, the Squire and the Apprentice were the best-received characters and became an important aspect to the franchise's brand. However, "as balance fluctuated the popularity of different characters would change." For example, the Summoner—a DLC character that allows players to engage the game as if it were a real-time strategy video game—has become one of the more popular characters. Overall, as the studio gained more insight into their players' behavior and preferences, Trendy approached creating new characters as a negotiation between what they wanted and what their fans wanted.

## Hardware Fragmentation

With it easier than ever for an indie company to bring a game to the masses, it is easy to forget that it was only a few short time ago that practically every studio needed a publisher in order for their game to have a chance of reaching the average consumer. For Trendy, that was not a good thing. "We originally developed *Dungeon Defenders* for Xbox360, PS3, and PC," says Asher, "but when our Xbox publisher went bankrupt, they still had the rights to the game."

Due to the legal difficulties arising from a bankruptcy, Trendy Entertainment was unable to get the rights back to its game for some time, leaving the studio unable to pursue console distribution until the publisher's legal issues had been worked out. The situation forced the studio to look into developing the game for mobile devices instead, which required the team to strip out elements of *Dungeon Defenders* to make it work. Although getting into the mobile market was never one of their primary goals, that necessary pivot made Trendy one of the first studios to use the Unreal Engine for mobile development.

As the studio worked to add new content and updates to *Dungeon Defenders*, it noticed that the game was most popular on PCs. Though it was well received across all platforms, the rising popularity of STEAM helped the game reach a larger PC audience. But popularity has its downside. The studio had to choose between updating and certifying all versions of the game at the same time or investing its time in the PC version while allowing the other versions of the game to update at a slower rate.

Clearly, it couldn't do both. Asher describes the quandary—and the ultimate decision—this way: "Do we keep the versions in sync? Do we get the PC version way ahead of the console versions? We decided, for better or worse, to serve the largest group of our community to the best of our ability—which meant releasing a lot of new heroes and new content for the PC, only a portion of which we were able to get through the certification process of other systems."



## Dungeon Defenders II

Trendy Entertainment spent over two years updating *Dungeon Defenders* and working on other intellectual properties before turning to *Dungeon Defenders II*. Instead of making this sequel a "bigger" version of the *Dungeon Defenders*, Trendy has chosen to produce a higher quality version that will start with a smaller roster. "We are adding a lot into the hero kits, and the heroes are a lot more robust, but we will have less than what the first game had after two years of support," says Asher. "But it will be better." Of course, this flies in the face of convention practice and expectations. Even though players and video game journalists understand that sequels will also benefit from updates and expansions, there seems to be little reward upfront for a studio to focus solely on producing a higher quality game.

The monetization of the two games will be very different, however. "One of our goals for the original *Dungeon Defenders* was to get it into as many hands as possible," Asher says. "We actually had huge debates going into the release of the game if it should be 10 or 15 dollars." Trendy Entertainment understood that as a co-op game, the original game would live or die by the number of people that fre-

quently played the game, but since free-to-play had not yet become widely accepted, that was not then an option.

*Dungeon Defenders II* will not have that same constraint now that F2P has proven to be a solid revenue-generator. And since Trendy Entertainment's desire remains to get as many people playing the game as possible, releasing *Dungeon Defenders II* as free-to-play is a natural evolution for the studio. The downside, of course, is that players can buy so much powerful gear in the F2P model that the game may no longer be enjoyable for other people. Trendy, however, has made sure that it doesn't sell any game-play advantages. "We're definitely not going to be a pay-to-win game," says Asher. "We will make sure that the purchases in the game remain positive for all players."





# How to Build a Dungeon



## Game Development in the Sunshine State

When mapping out the geography of the video game industry, Trendy Entertainment is pretty much an island unto itself. Located in Gainesville, FL, Trendy Entertainment is a long way from the video game studios clusters along the two coasts of the United States. While that location might seem ideal for a couple of University of Florida alums, it has become increasingly problematic as the studio has grown. "As our aspirations got larger from *Dungeon Defenders* to *Dungeon Defenders II*," says Asher, "the kind of talent that we needed to hire to help us make that game got larger—and it is harder to find those people locally. But we've been phenomenally successful bringing that talent on." Some of this talent includes Rob Moore of EA Sports and Darrell Rodriquez, the former president of LucasArts.

Meanwhile, Trendy Entertainment remains focused on getting *Dungeon Defenders II* ready for the masses. The studio is planning on expanding the number of people playing it for early access from 1,000 to 1,100 by the end of 2014. Though no firm deadline has been set, the goal of increasing the number of early-access players will give the studio the needed feedback to have the game released sometime in 2015. At the same time, the studio will be investing more time in Playverse, the backend infrastructure designed to allow players to easily play a game across multiple platforms and servers. ❁





## Indie Corner

# UK Developers Take on *LA Cops*

## A Different Sort of Modern Dream

**M**odern Dream is a brand new game development company based in the UK. We've drawn a lot of inspiration from the indie games movement that has reinvigorated games and allowed brave new ideas to become a reality. These in turn have lent new life to the infinite possibilities that games offer. That's what really interests us as game makers: the opportunity to realize something entirely new and utterly compelling.

As a new studio we have the opportunity to take hard-earned lessons from our reservoir of experience in the games industry to create a truly agile and adaptable organization. We're using all of that experience as we develop our very first game, *LA Cops* (targeted for release in the fall/winter of 2014). Even five years ago we couldn't image bringing a game to market without being attached to a major studio, but today we see others doing it almost daily. So why not us?

To develop a distinct visual style, we work like collage artists, combining great ideas in new ways that provide an entirely new experience like nothing before.



### Sources of Inspiration

*LA Cops* is a straightforward shooter with a cool, pop art style, soon available to play across multiple platforms. Players take on the roles of multiple '70s-era Los Angeles cops who have a range of attributes to upgrade and improve during the course of the game. For added fun, the game enables players to control more than one cop in a level.

To develop a distinct visual style, we work like collage artists, combining great ideas in new ways that provide an entirely new experience like nothing before. The inspiration for *LA Cops* was derived from a variety of sources:

- Game inspiration came from an assortment of 16-bit and PC gaming classics that combined accessible but hard-to-master game-play with strong graphical style: *Another World*, *Cannon Fodder*, *Syndicate*, *Interstate 76*, *Nitro Riders* and *Hotline Miami*.
- Art inspiration came from two paintings: David Hockney's *A Bigger Splash* and Edward Ruscha's *Standard*. The clean lines and strong vibrant colors of these pieces create a sense of optimism and fun while showing off the possibilities of the American Dream.
- We wanted a truly rock-n-roll soundtrack, so for inspiration we turned to two classic albums: Led Zeppelin's *Rage Against the Machine* and the Beastie Boys' *Sabotage* (which also brought additional inspiration to the visual style of the game). The music on these albums has timeless appeal that is ready for a fresh revisit.
- Finally, California itself and the great city of Los Angeles provided a complex, vibrant palette of colors and ideas that have shaped our modern world.





by Oliver Clarke;  
Director, *Modern Dream*;  
Coventry, UK

## The Well of Creativity Runneth Over

Our inspirational sources are eclectic, but they have common themes that allow them to work together. The wonder of video games is that they combine so many disciplines from art to design to music to engineering—it can easily become an overwhelming challenge. We've found that the best way to meld such a broad range of inputs is to simplify. It's hard work and it takes time; however, simplifying the elements of the game enables production to take the very essence and most exciting aspects of ideas and bring them to life. For example, there are a range of rendering effects that modern GPUs can process almost effortlessly, but that doesn't mean they should all be used.

Simplicity lends a unique idea the strength to work together with the essence of other ideas to create a new whole that is exciting, innovative and grabs the attention. I have had one or two important industry people say to me, "When will the artwork be finished in the game?" To some people a game should have all of the effects; otherwise it's not done. We've taken a brave step in believing that if the concept has a solid foundation then it will speak for itself and does not require layers of complexity.

To some people a game should have all the effects; otherwise it's not done. We've taken a brave step in believing that if the concept has a solid foundation then it will speak for itself and does not require layers of complexity.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Yulia Vakhrusheva  
(Casual Connect), Helana Santos  
(Modern Dream), Oliver Clarke  
(Modern Dream) at EGX 2014

## Tools that Really Work

We're using a number of products and workflows to bring *LA Cops* to life: Xara and Photoshop for concepts, art and textures; MayaLT for all the levels, characters and in game animations; and finally Unity to create and put the game together.

I've worked with Xara since I was at college. It offers clean vector art that matches the art style effortlessly, and it works extremely well with Photoshop for the fine image treatments and filters.

For me, MayaLT is like a well-kept secret that is just beginning to leak out. It's the best application for making 3D game assets out there. The modeling tools are top notch—you can literally model anything very quickly with its new tool set. The skinning and character animation tools are exceptionally powerful and robust and make short work of getting assets made. What's more, animations can be bought in and then replaced with high-quality, bespoke animations over time as they are produced. This is crucial because it means

# UK Developers Take on *LA Cops*

programmers can get what they need to keep working on game-play even while the artists are still polishing assets to game-ready quality.

Unity works exceptionally well with the FBX file format that MayaLT exports. When I started in the industry there was a checklist of literally 100 items to get an asset into a game engine, and if one of those wasn't met the asset wouldn't work (or worse: it would often crash the game). Working with Unity does away with all that nonsense. Bugs can be tracked down and fixed in minutes rather than hours, which means that putting the game together is very easy once you know what you're trying to achieve.

Tools like these have lowered the cost of production without any sacrifice to quality. If anything, quality continues to go up as we learn new methods and insights from working with players directly. That's not to say games are cheaper to make overall. New challenges to making a commercially successful game have arisen which are far from easy to beat.



not used to playing games that way. In other words, we don't want to alienate other types of players who may well enjoy *LA Cops* as much as hardcore games players.

The best way to ensure that the game is suitable for multiple player types is through usability testing. We've been lucky enough to

is that players will quickly go elsewhere for their hard earned spare time entertainment.

We've also started a dialog with our audience via social media—Twitter in particular. That strategy has the added benefit of helping to generate pre-release attention for our game. We know that if we make a great game but no one knows about it then we might as well have not made the game in the first place.

But we know that it's not easy. There is so much content competing for attention, it can be very hard to stand out. That's why we recommend these three considerations as you think about bringing your own game to market:

## 1. **Know who is playing your game.**

Who are they? What drives them? What are they interested in? What games do they like and how do they like to play them? The only way to learn this is through diligent research performed over time. Definitely get hold of the surveys and read them, but also get hold of people who play games and ask them! Have as many casual chats with gamers as you can and ask lots of questions.

## 2. **Put out a consistent positive message over time.**

Keep it simple and work hard at it. The benefits will come in the long term. *Earn* your players—conversation by conversation—and gradually you'll build up an audience of players who understand



## Playing to Multiple Audiences

*LA Cops* is intended for players with very specific tastes. We're not making the game specifically for us, we're making it for them, and we have to make sure it's what they like and want. One challenge is to make a game that matches what they've come to expect while also making it accessible to players who are

have *LA Cops* tested by Player Research. Having worked with them, I can honestly say that they can make all the difference to the overall success of a game. With so many games out there, it's crucial to listen to what they say. Our games need to be intuitive and easy to play so that the players can have fun effortlessly. The price of not doing usability testing



and respect what you're doing. Above all, your message should tell people why they should care, then it should tell them how you're doing, and finally it should tell them what they need to do to support you on your quest to deliver a great game.

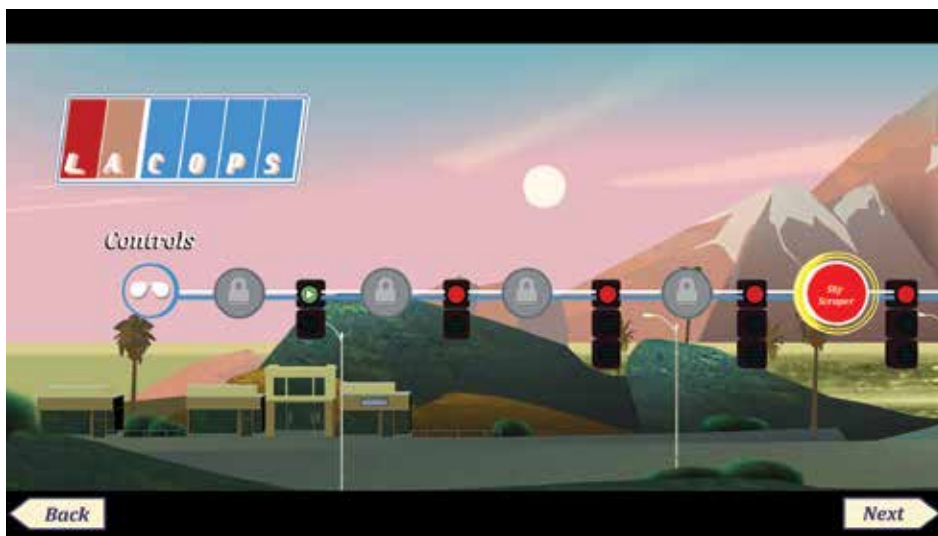
### 3. **Tell a compelling story!**

People love a story that appeals to their interests and draws them in. It's easier to remember than a message and gives people a reason to care about what you're doing. It's not easy to present a great story and tell it well, but it does work. It enables people to feel for what you're doing and engage with the experience. With games, experiences are what we're all about.

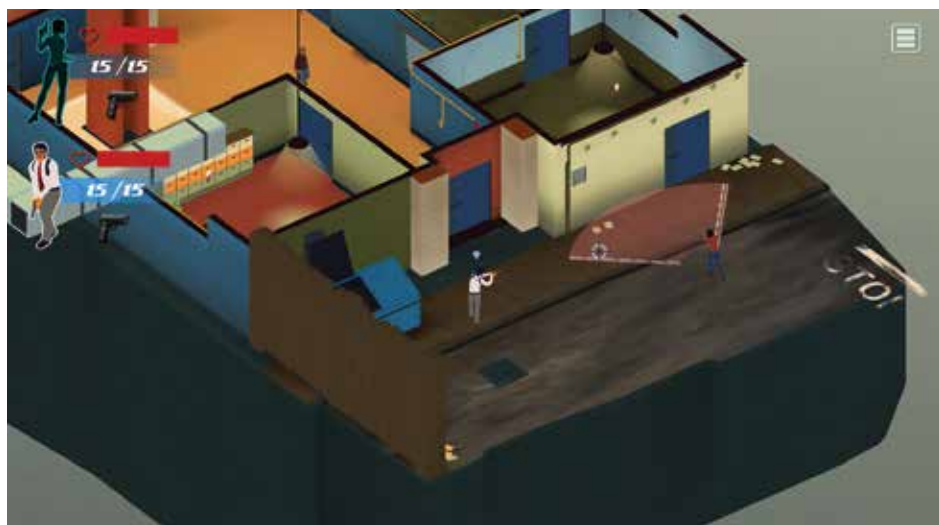
#### **The End Is Just the Beginning**

During the development of *LA Cops*, it seems that about a million new technologies and developments have hit the games industry. When it comes to the future of our industry I see it slightly differently to most. I don't see VR as the big opportunity at the moment for one simple reason, people hate wearing things. Especially if they're big and clunky and make you feel uncomfortable. I've no doubt the form factors will reduce in size considerably over time however we're not there yet.

With 4K screens on the other hand, I think we have a great opportunity to produce images of striking clarity and fluidity at 60 frames



We've also started a dialog with our audience via social media—Twitter in particular. That strategy has the added benefit of helping to generate pre-release attention for our game.



per second. 4K+ screens will become a far more medium compelling for players over the next few years.

There are massive challenges in that area however those with the talent, of which there are many, and the backing to meet them, of which there are few, will do well.

I think we'll also see phones and set top boxes that can receive and broadcast stunning imagery. Gaming across platforms will continue to become more seamless as player data becomes stored permanently in the cloud. Our online presence will only become more important over time and services will continue to appear that facilitate it.

Free to play games are certainly here to stay and have already matured into some great game experiences however the days of exploitative Free to Play games are numbered. Players from all backgrounds are wising up quickly and know when they're being exploited.

Regardless of any of my opinions on the above what remains constant is a desire for high quality entertainment. The teams that can produce that for the platforms people want to play on will be the success stories of the future. Execution and quality of execution is key.

These challenges are ahead of us, and they are very big challenges indeed. The car did not arrive at the same time as the steam engine. It was born out of it. *LA Cops* is not our solution to these challenges but our solid foundation upon which we will reach out and tackle them with gusto. ✨



## Exclusive Interview

# Family-centric Fun and Development

## An Interview with Josef Hall

**At his core, Josef Hall is a family man. It is an aspect of his personality that influenced how he came to make games, and by extension it also shapes KingsIsle Entertainment, the studio where he works currently as Vice President and Creative Director. Hall started his video game career in 2003 when he established Wolfpack Studios and created the game *Shadowbane*. Hall left Wolfpack for KingsIsle in 2005 and has worked with the company to produce *Wizard101* and *Pirate101*.**

We asked; he answered. Here's what we learned....

# Q&A

**You have been with KingsIsle since 2005. How do you think the company has changed in response to changes in the market?**

**JOSEF HALL:** I would imagine that there are many studios and publishers out there wrestling with the rapid changes we're seeing in the market. Facing the explosive growth in mobile and millions of games being deployed on these new devices feels like a race against a daunting genetic algorithm. What game designs and monetization techniques work well? And which don't?

We've remained very dedicated to our existing products at the root level. Years post-launch, we continue to provide deep story and game-play additions to *Wizard101* and *Pirate101*, which are our first two large MMORPGs.

Beyond this, however, we're opening up many new unexplored opportunities in the creative spaces between old paradigms. KingsIsle has experimented with this in games like *Grub Guardian*—a mobile game that interfaces directly into one of our large MMORPGs. In *Grub Guardian*, the player can actually impact their progress in *Wizard101* by leveling pets and gaining increased abilities. We have unan-

nounced projects that are going to take this several steps further. In addition, we have several entirely new mobile games currently in development—large and small. I think many people would be shocked by the variety of those games.

As the studio has grown, we've worked hard to find ways to encourage creativity and passion. One of the ways that we do this is by regularly having a KingsIsle "Game Jam." Employees have an opportunity, over the course of a few days, to invent and build any game idea they can dream up. Some of our new projects have arisen through that process.

**Prior to working for KingsIsle, you were the president of your own company. Given your time in the industry, what suggestions do you have for people now entering video game production?**

**JH:** With *Shadowbane*, the game I made at my prior company, I was building a game specifically for player-versus-player combat. The game let players form their own guilds, build their own towns, and ultimately declare war on each other. This was at a time when players fighting each other in an MMO was considered a problem to be stopped, not a feature.

With *Wizard101* I followed the same thought process, but in the opposite direction: I wanted to build a game that families could enjoy together. Most of the big online games being released at the time were not safe for kids to play.

Even though the types of games I make at KingsIsle are very different from *Shadowbane*,





I wanted to build a game that families could enjoy together.

there is a common thread that runs through them all. I like building products that are very different than what already exists. In particular, I'm interested in underserved or outright ignored markets.

**What was the initial inspiration for *Wizard101*? Specifically, how did King's Isle come to the decision to create fantasy game aimed at kids and teens?**

**JH:** The idea came from various influences and discussions Todd Coleman (the co-creator of *Wizard101*) and I had over the course of several months, if not years.

In the world today we've popularized a misconception about creativity. Something's considered creative if it's never been seen before by human eyes. Although that's certainly true, there is a much more prevalent type of creativity that's at work all around us.

Apple computer products are often hailed as an example of "true creativity," but as many people are aware, they are actually a beautiful synthesis and perfection of dozens of pre-existing ideas. And, in fact, Steve Jobs said that creativity is really just "connecting things"—and that the creator might even feel a sense of guilt when asked how they did it, because what they actually did was just see connections.

*Wizard101* is an amalgam of games, movies, books, and dreams that Todd and I discussed at length. Some of those might be more obvious than others. We're both huge fantasy fans. Our first online game was a text-based, multiplayer, fantasy adventure (a MUD) that we ran in college in the early '90s. We both love movies like *Army of Darkness* and *Star Wars* and novels by authors like C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, H.P. Lovecraft (apparently

# Josef Hall



any author that goes by their initials!). As far as game inspirations, we really love the cinematic feel of games like *Final Fantasy* and the approachability of the former Disney MMO, *ToonTown*.

One other inspiration for me personally (and an important one) was that I had three young daughters by the time we started thinking about our next game, and I wanted to build something that they could find joy in playing, that appealed to boys and girls, and that was safe for kids.

**KingsIsle makes games that are considered family-friendly. Do you think the genre of games it makes in any way influences the work culture of the company?**

**JH:** Absolutely it does. In fact, the two things are very much intertwined. After spending several months crunching (working nights and weekends) to bring *Shadowbane* to market, and not seeing my young children and wife for weeks at a time, I decided to leave the games industry. I made a personal commitment to

never spend that much time away from my family again. I had justified it in my mind by believing that if I worked hard enough early, then I would have the freedom to spend more time with them later. It's a gamble with something that you'll never get back.

So before starting KingsIsle, Todd and I specifically discussed how you could build a game company with a healthy work/life balance. It's not an easy thing to achieve, and I would argue that it's a little bit of a leap of faith. I believe that if your game developers are happy, it's reflected in the games you build, but taking the time it requires to build a great game—without long periods of crunching—can be a nerve-racking proposition for a publisher or investor. We were very lucky to start KingsIsle with our CEO, Elie Akilian, who not only supported and believed in our vision, but pushed us to build a better product and company.

Of course we still have periods during which we have to dig in and push hard to make objectives, but we always try to limit these to a few weeks at most. We also counterbalance



that need with having “Fun Days” where we rent out a movie theater and watch something fun together, or take a half-day to play board games, or even occasionally go do local charity work together.

We’re people, not drones, and I truly believe that when you treat people with that respect you will get much, much more from them—voluntarily.

**Wizard101 was first released in 2008. At the time, there was Disney’s Wizards of Waverly Place and the Harry Potter franchise was still growing in popularity. How did Kingsisle differentiate Wizard101 from other wizard-reality media?**

**JH:** We really didn’t. We really didn’t compare and contrast ourselves with other things. Our single-minded focus on the product we wanted to build helped us in the long run. With any product you conceive, there’s probably a great risk that you will worry about being too much like something else, and instead of focusing on what you enjoy and find fun, you’ll start trying to *not* be something. This can be poisonous to good design. It can even be an issue with your own products.

When we were building *Pirate101*, there was much internal angst over it being compared to *Wizard101*. But in the end, many players and even critics found some of the similarities to be a bonus. As long as you’re only drawing inspiration from the things you love and not plagiarizing, then I really do believe you need to distance yourself from those worries and just tell the story that you want to tell.

I should also give credit to our marketing department here. I had never experienced the real power of great marketing before. *Wizard101* runs national television commercials and aggressive online marketing campaigns that are optimized frequently. As long as you have a good product, the combination is something amazing.

**Wizard101 is an MMORPG and a turn-based combat system. Did Kingsisle encounter any difficulties creating this game-play? How did Kingsisle determine how players’ decks could be built while still keeping the game competitive?**

**JH:** I’m pretty sure we encountered *every* difficulty that could possibly come from creating a turn-based, cinematic combat system in an MMORPG! It was a grueling, occasionally fun task that started with a stack of physical spell cards drawn by Todd. Todd and I would play the game for hours (until he was tired of the beating I dished out). Then we would tweak the cards and try again.

Eventually we felt confident enough in the core system to build a simple, web-like (2D) version of the game that several people could play. It was a blast! But it was also very competitive between players. Given our background with *Shadowbane*, that might not be surprising, but it was something we realized at this point we had to remove. We wanted the game to encourage, or at least not punish, cooperation.

Finally we made a 3D version of combat with beautiful, long, cinematic sequences for each spell. Combat was way, *way* too long. Every camera movement and detail of every action was scrutinized over and over. We spent hundreds of hours refining combat until we thought it was perfect. Then we presented it to Elie, and he told us to make it even better. We spent the next few months refining it even

One inspiration for me personally (and an important one) was that I had three young daughters by the time we started thinking about our next game, and I wanted to build something that they could find joy in playing, that appealed to boys and girls, and that was safe for kids.



further—and then the real work started.

We worked with James Nance, Rhea Shelley, and Artie Rogers to balance the spells and decks. They would play the various classes together for weeks, tweaking some ideas and scraping others. To give you an example of

# Josef Hall

how much work went into this part of the process, we completely redesigned the spell deck interface no less than eight times.

Even now, six years after launch, we continue to refine the model.

**To develop the combat mechanics for *Wizard101*, were there any games the development team turned to for inspiration?**

**JH:** We were inspired by things like *Final Fantasy*, for its epic cinematic feel; various card games, for the sense of collection and strategy; and *ToonTown*, for its approachability and open combat model.



**Given *Wizard101*'s young audience, player interaction is limited based on their ages. How did Kingsisle determine these interaction limits? Since the game's launch, has the company gained any insight into how players respond to these limitations?**

**JH:** The answer to this one deserves a book; however, it would probably be a boring one, so let me try to touch on the critical concepts that we wrestled with.

An MMORPG must have strong social interaction at its core. What's the point of building a large complex server infrastructure for a real-time, massively multiplayer simulation if a player is just going to run around in a self-

contained bubble? Having friends and sharing experiences with them is what makes these types of games special. That said, if you are going to have children in a social environment, it *must* be safe.

As I mentioned, I have three young daughters, all of whom were in elementary school as I built *Wizard101*. Imagining them in the game drove me personally to find any and all ways to make sure that interactions with other players were appropriate. To start with, for some players we only allow chatting via a menu of many preselected (and some dynamic) phrases. Beyond that, if a parent enables open chat, through which players can freely type messages to each other, we employ a stringent system of: 1) only allowing a dictionary of white-listed words; and 2) checking the final sentence against black-listed phrases. Things that we explicitly try to guard against are numbers, real world locations, and any other chat that lends itself to disclosing personally-identifiable information. Older players can use a more open form of chat, but the system always runs a message through its filters based on the listener and not the speaker. In other words, adults with full open chat will have their messages filtered appropriately when they are talking to those with a more stringent setting. We continue working to improve and try to perfect the system.

Another method we use for controlling player behavior is our "Black Ball System." If a player is doing something you find questionable, you can report them, and that report counts as one Black Ball against them. If this happens enough, the system automatically downgrades their allowed form of communication to menu-driven chat only. These reports are submitted with the most recent communications so that accounts even can be suspended if necessary.

We also appoint certain trusted community members as "Hall Monitors." These highly trusted players can instantly mute and report other players in-game. A Hall Monitor's report is marked as a high priority for internal review.

Obviously, these types of systems and procedures can feel restrictive to some, but I think that most of our community appreciates that

it makes for a safe, family-friendly online environment. And our efforts have been recognized with “Parent Tested, Parent Approved” and “National Parenting Publication” awards.

**The payment models for *Wizard101* are either subscription or free-to-play with micro-transactions. Have these payment systems revealed any interesting data about your players?**

**JH:** We’ve noticed many interesting things after analyzing this data for a few years. For starters, we now have a model that will tell us with over 90% certainty if a free-to-play player is going to become a paying customer. I would have guessed that this wasn’t possible just by looking at basic game-play behavior.

We also have a small percentage of free-to-play players who have continued to play the game for free since launch. That’s six years for free! I think for some people it’s a fun challenge to see how far you can advance without paying anything.

Maybe this is not surprising, but the average time played by subscribers is three times that of our players who purchase the game only through micro-transactions.

**How did KingsIsle approach releasing *Wizard101* in different countries? Did you find that some regions required a slightly different marketing approach?**

**JH:** We acknowledged that there are too many factors in each locale for us to be an expert on them all. For example, there should be no depictions of blood in Germany, a game should avoid the use of skeletons in China, etc. So we partnered with Gameforge in Europe and Taomee in China to launch *Wizard101* in those locations.

We spent many hours making sure that, not only game text, but images, models, and other art could be easily altered for any given region. We exposed many game balance controls for our partners to adjust by region, and we even helped with purely aesthetic art modifications for various regions. In turn, our partners have marketed and supported the game in these regions, and that allows us to focus less on international logistics and more on the games.

**What lessons did the studio learn from producing and marketing *Wizard101* that influenced your work on *Pirate101*?**



**JH:** To be perfectly honest with you, I feel like I learned more lessons from building *Shadowbane* than *Wizard101*.

Building *Shadowbane*, we were an indie team led by a couple of people that had never made a single commercial game. The odds were certainly not in my favor. And even though it was never a commercial success, I’m very proud that the team was able to bring it to market. I learned enough to fill a book about leadership, scope, focus, and the beauty of simplicity.

**We now have a model that will tell us with over 90% certainty if a free-to-play player is going to become a paying customer.**

Keeping things simple, but making them deep at the same time is a very difficult task. It may be paramount when making a game that you want to appeal to a broad audience.

I think both *Wizard101* and *Pirate101* benefitted from these lessons.

**What are KingsIsle's long-term plans?**

**JH:** As I mentioned earlier, we have several mobile games currently in development—large and small—and we also have some developers that work one day a week on various research projects that might be considered risky or unproven.

Our belief is that by letting our employees have such a deep level of involvement in the process, and by providing a balanced and fun work environment, the results will speak for themselves. ❄



# Studio Spotlight

# FlowPlay

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 2006

**URL:** [www.flowplay.com](http://www.flowplay.com)

**HEADQUARTERS:** Seattle, WA

**EMPLOYEES:** 40+



Derrick Morton,  
CEO of FlowPlay

**It was 2007, and the Internet** was teeming with free web games. “The real pain in the market at the time was that there were a lot of free web games that no one could figure out how to monetize,” says industry veteran Derrick Morton. “We figured if we could create a meta game architecture around hundreds of games tied into a virtual economy, we’d have something cool.” It was that bit of inspiration that led to

the formation of FlowPlay, where Morton now works as CEO. And that “meta game architecture” eventually evolved into a full-fledged virtual world, populated by avatars and offering virtual items to purchase. It also provided the foundation for FlowPlay’s first game, *ourWorld*, and for the company’s overall business model.

## Welcome to *ourWorld*

In 2005, New Horizon Interactive (now known as Disney Canada) released *Club Penguin*, a game for kids between the ages 6 and 14 which provided an experience similar to what FlowPlay wanted to offer its players. “We didn’t want to go head to head with them,” Morton says, “so we created a game for the *Club Penguin* kids to graduate to when they got older.” Specifically, FlowPlay decided to “target teenage girls while most companies at the time were focused on kids in general and boys in particular.”

The visual style for the game sprang from the music world—specifically the video for “Feel Good Inc.” by the Gorillaz. “That video gave us the idea of an island floating in the sky—where kids on a planet discover an energy called *flow*.” The energy of

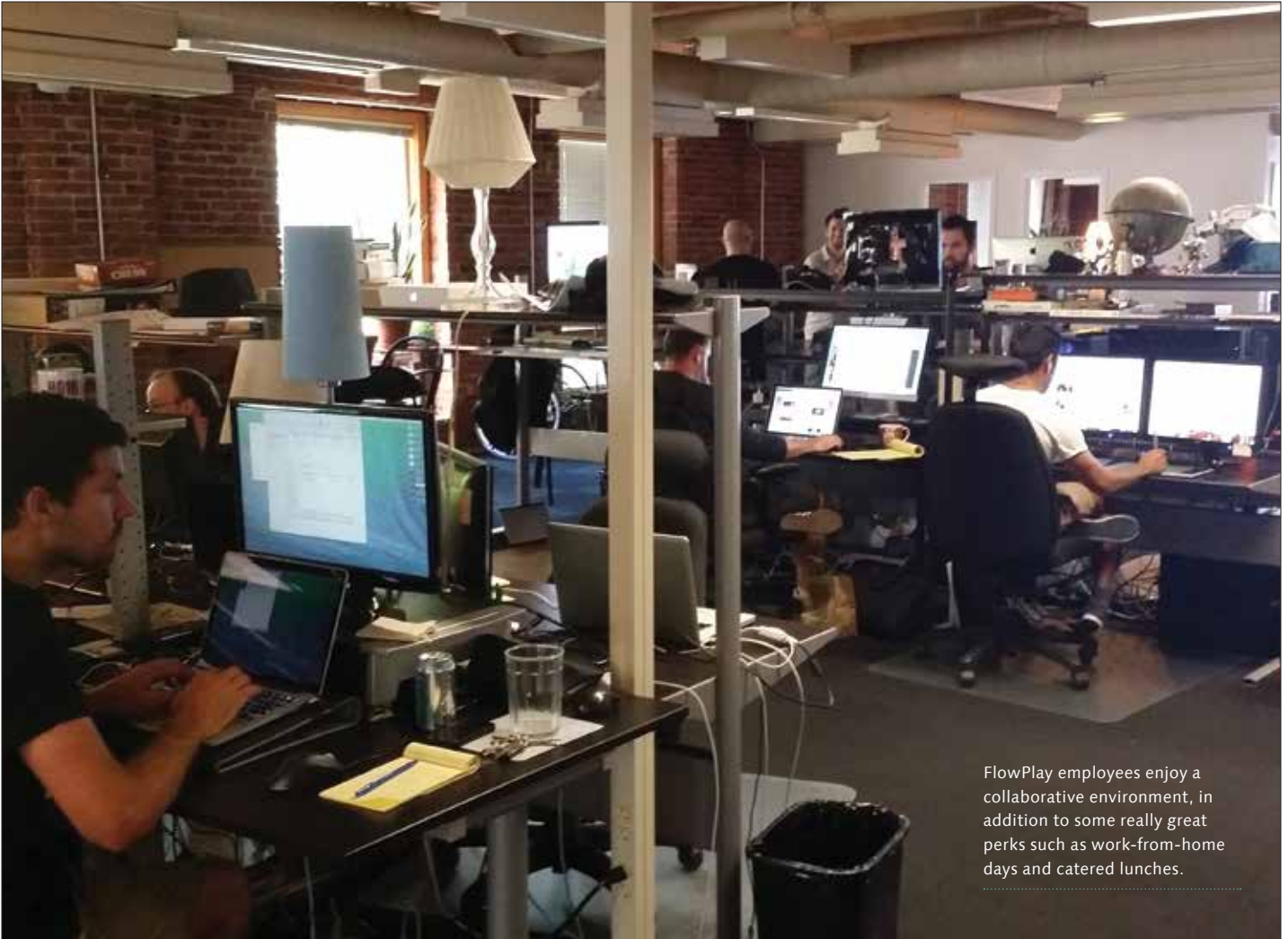
*flow* enables kids “to create their own island in the sky, taking them to another world.”

The successful combination of FlowPlay’s target demographic and the visual style of *ourWorld* was augmented by the MMORPG nature of the virtual environment. “Our players form real friendships that go beyond the game and into the real world,” says Morton. “These relationships directly influence our user retention rates. Because our players have reason to return—beyond just the games—they tend to come back more often, for longer spans of time, and return for several months longer than industry standards.” To his point, average lifetime player revenue for *ourWorld* peaks at seven months. “The average *ourWorld* player who logged in during the past 30 days has been playing the game for over two years.”

## Entering the World of Gambling

After a number of successful years running *ourWorld*, FlowPlay began focusing on a new, rapidly growing segment with the development of another product designed to take advantage of the fun of playing games of chance while avoiding the myriad of gambling laws in the United States. To bypass these restrictions FlowPlay decided that players would not be able to cash out their earnings. “We’re focusing on the social casino industry,” Morton says, “because RMG (real money gaming) has much higher operational costs due to licensing, regulatory compliance, fraud control, and a host of other issues specific to running a business that allows players to win real money.” Morton isn’t against the idea of FlowPlay one day allowing players to play for real money, however.

Just as FlowPlay knew that there was an opportunity in reaching a specific demographic with *ourWorld*, they saw an opportunity to create an easy-to-use platform for those who have never played an



FlowPlay employees enjoy a collaborative environment, in addition to some really great perks such as work-from-home days and catered lunches.



Visitors to the Seattle-based FlowPlay office are greeted with a serene forest scene behind the waiting area. The company moved into a new office space over the summer to accommodate a growing staff.



Conference rooms in FlowPlay's new office are decorated to represent characters from *ourWorld* and *Vegas World*. This conference room is inspired by one of *ourWorld*'s main characters, Derek.



# FlowPlay

Our players form real friendships that go beyond the game and into the real world. These relationships directly influence our user retention rates.

MMO. This motivated FlowPlay to begin development of *Vegas World* especially for middle-aged women.

Since both *ourWorld* and *Vegas World* run on similar code, FlowPlay sought to increase the game's user-friendliness by simply "turning things off or on in each game to tune it to the audience." The visuals differ as well. "For *Vegas World*, we have a similar design style but there are also a lot of subtle differences. The avatars look more adult and, thematically, we have more adult things within the world."



A *Vegas World* player gets a jackpot in one of the many slots games. *Vegas World* is a social casino MMORPG in which users enjoy casual casino games including blackjack, poker, solitaire, bingo, and more.

Like *ourWorld*, *Vegas World* also has multiplayer functionality. To make *Vegas World* a more immersive experience, FlowPlay designed its new MMORPG to allow players in the same room to buy and share items. In addition, Morton says that the firm "focused on creating a multiplayer infrastructure that allowed for cross-platform play with *Vegas World*, so we built specific architecture for accomplishing that—creating a new technology that no one has ever done." For example, when a player buys a drink while play-



*ourWorld* players chat on the boardwalk. This is one of the many social environments available within the rich virtual world designed for teens.

ing blackjack, everyone else in the room gets a drink as well, and the odds increase dramatically as long as the drink lasts.

## Betting on the Future

One of the biggest changes to the sector of gaming that FlowPlay specializes in is the rise of mobile platforms. The release of the iPhone in 2007 and the iPad in 2010 has had a big impact. "It has forced us to think about mobile platforms when designing our UI," Morton says. "Since we try to maintain the same client across all platforms, it's a challenge to create a UI that works everywhere." For players, of course, FlowPlay's philosophy has been a great thing. "You can be playing blackjack in *Vegas World* on Facebook with another player on a Kindle and someone else on an iPad—all with the same experience."

Looking forward, Morton expects voice chatting to become more important to these games sooner rather than later. Moreover, gambling games have been limited by the physical hardware available at the time they were created. Consequently, many standard casino games haven't changed much since they were first created. "I'm excited about the idea of developers coming up with new styles of casino games," says Morton, "taking mechanics from one type of game and applying it to another to create new hybrid-style casino games. I think you'll begin to see a lot of innovation begin to come into the space as more and more casual game developers take a look at the opportunities."

As for FlowPlay, Morton says: "Our plan is to enter some new markets that have never been touched by the casual/social games industry and push the envelope when it comes to defining what a social casino game can be." ❄



# THE GAMES INDUSTRY'S MOST FLEXIBLE ANALYTICS SOLUTION



Now includes;

- Acquisition Optimizer**  
 Understand the profitability of your acquisition channels by combining attribution partners such as Appsflyer, Adjust and HasOffers with actual and predicted Lifetime Value and Churn models
- Direct Access**  
 Access high performance querying by plugging your favorite analytics tools such as Tableau, R, Excel and SQL directly into our Vertica environment
- Actionable Segmentation**  
 Create, analyze and target any segment of players so you make your game responsive to different playing styles

Sign up for free at [www.deltadna.com/signup](http://www.deltadna.com/signup) or request a demo at [www.deltadna.com/request-a-demo](http://www.deltadna.com/request-a-demo)

[www.deltadna.com](http://www.deltadna.com)

[@delta\\_DNA](https://twitter.com/delta_DNA)



# Game Changers

## Four Game Development Entrepreneurs Who Are Helping to Shape the Industry

**Perhaps you've noticed: The casual games industry with its rapid change and creative focus is ripe for entrepreneurs. What keeps entrepreneurs motivated during times of adversity? So, we asked four game industry entrepreneurs from around the world to share their perspective on what is important for their companies, the games industry and for them personally.**



**Elin Jonsson**  
**Imaginary Games,**  
**Co-Founder/Artist**

COUNTRY: Canada/Sweden  
YEARS OF INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: 3  
FAVORITE GAME: *Limbo*

### **When did you know that you wanted to have a career as an artist?**

As early as I can remember, I always wanted to work with art or be an artist for a living. I loved to paint, and I have my mom to thank for buying all of the paintings I made as a child. When it came time to choose a career however, I didn't have enough confidence in my skills to choose artist as a career. So I went with what was recommended as the most *responsible alternative* and graduated as an art teacher.

I found a job quickly near Lund—Sweden's college town. I was actually on a train to Lund to begin my career as a teacher when my phone rang. It was Jesper Heed, the director of Peace and Love, Sweden's biggest annual music festival. Jesper had seen some of my paintings on display in a gallery in Dalarna and asked if I would come and work for Peace and Love as an Illustrator. I said "Yes" immediately, got off at the next stop, and took the next train to Borlänge.

Peace and Love gave me a lot of freedom to express myself creatively and work with all kinds of media. I illustrated posters, advertisements, and books, and after two years I became the Art Director responsible for the look-and-feel of the brand and festival.

### **Have you had any difficulty making the transition from illustrator to digital artist?**

Interestingly, when we came up with the idea for the *Afterland* game, I had planned on digitally illustrating the characters. After several attempts in Photoshop, Illustrator and Corel I became frustrated because I was not able to express my vision digitally. I remember the day that I left the office early—frustrated with my digital work—and found solace by painting for myself with acrylic on wood. I had a good flow that day and brought a painting from start to finish in a single sitting. Late that night we came up with the idea to paint characters for the game with a real-world method and digitize the completed work when it was finished.

### **Given that most of your work is on the artistic side of game development, how have you handled the business demands of founding a studio?**

I was fortunate to become a partner in Imaginary Games after it had been in business for more than two years. It was a good opportunity to "hit the ground running" but also risky to not know what had already been done and what needed doing.

As a cofounder I have met with a variety of business investors, publishers, lawyers, accountants, etc. In many meetings I have just listened and quietly learned a tremendous amount about a complex and constantly changing game industry. My confidence built over

Production teams are made up of males around the same age with similar interests. Nevertheless, I have often felt—and sometimes still feel—like there is a private club that speaks a secret language, and I am not a member.

time as I became more familiar with the free-to-play model, metric-driven design, and strategies for brand visibility and user acquisition. There is more work involved in running a studio than I imagined.

If I am working on a logical aspect of the business and switch over to a creative task, there is always a certain amount of time needed to achieve a decent flow. My artistic work—which often demands exploration with trial and error—gets constrained by invasive thoughts that tell me to be careful not to make a mistake. I have found that the best results come from grouping logical and creative tasks into larger chunks of time to lessen the frequency of moving between them in a day.

**One of the greatest obstacles when doing creative work is mental fatigue and boredom with a project. What do you do for inspiration when you've hit a creative wall?**

I am lucky to be working with cofounder Chris Powell on the creative elements of *Afterland*. It has been a lot of fun to create with someone else, sharing ideas both good and terrible—and to trust each other with something that needs to be handled with care.

I also love to browse through the works of talented artists such as Mark Ryden, Ray Caesar, Nicoletta Ceccoli and many other pop surrealist artists. If I am not careful I can lose myself in a Pinterest expedition, pulled along by the promise of finding treasure around every corner.

Inspiration can come from many other places as well. I love to go to the circus or watch different types of performing arts (I am a closet fan of *So You Think You Can Dance*). I like to spend my free time in coffee shops drawing and reading Victorian fiction and old fairy tales.

**Though women make up half of the video game market, only a fraction of video game production is done by women. What are some aspects of the video game industry that you think discourages women from entering the industry?**

Video game production can be uncomfortable for women because there is a general lack of

**I want women new to the industry to know that they are not alone. They need to be strong, support each other, and know that the diversity they bring is not a weakness but a strength.**

diversity in the work environment. In Sweden and North America I have found that production teams are made up of males around the same age with similar interests. Nevertheless, I have often felt—and sometimes still feel—like there is a private club that speaks a secret language, and I am not a member.

I hope to see the industry mature like literature or film and that it will attract talented people who bring diversity to the workplace and to the games that are created. I am inspired by the women who dedicate themselves to creating change in this area. They are real pioneers.

**What advice would you offer women interested in entering the gaming industry?**

It can be discouraging to bring new ideas to your team and have them regularly discarded because they do not appeal to the collective “gamer consciousness.” Over time, the feeling that you are regularly “wrong” can make you doubt your abilities and end up blocking your creativity. If this happens, I want women new to the industry to know that they are not alone. They need to be strong, support each other, and know that the diversity they bring is not a weakness but a strength.

We must remember that the mobile platform has made games accessible to many females for the first time. It is an exciting place to be, and I am confident that female developers will help to shape the future of this industry.



**Arpita Kapoor**  
**Mech Mocha Game Studios,**  
**Chief Mocha/CEO**

COUNTRY: India

YEARS OF INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: 1.5

FAVORITE GAME: *Rayman Origins*

**What was the inspiration for creating Mech Mocha?**

Be it running food stalls in fairs or selling energy drinks at athletic meets in school, doing things on my own has always been there in me. During my second year in college, I did an internship as a graphic programmer for a game company here in India, where I worked on *APOX*, a real-time strategy game. Post that I designed a board game for the *UNESCO for Change* program.

Looking at the vibrancy of the game industry from so close, and understanding the mobile games market during the Scholars Program, I felt very inspired to start Mech Mocha.

**One goal of Mech Mocha is to create games without violent content. Given that Mech Mocha's first game, *Puppet Punch*, involves punching and projectile weapons, how are you defining violent content?**

Violent content for us refers to realistic violence in games from an aesthetic perspective. As an example, consider *Super Meat Boy*—just that red blood splash while dying makes the whole thing feel a bit violent. Mario (from *Super Mario Bros.*) used to jump on ducks and



shoot at the koopas, but that never felt violent. We chose the enemies in the game to be puppets because puppets are made of wood—if you blast them, they don't splash blood. I like the way *Rayman Jungle Run* has done their character death animations—the characters plump and die so adorably.

**How has your experience being part of an incubator and accelerator helped you approach game design and studio development?**

Being part of an accelerator helped me approach the studio more as a company and not just as one game. It also helped us understand the legal aspects involved in working with a collaborative team overseas, key terms in our publishing contract, etc. Raising investment for a game company in India is not that common, but being part of the accelerator helped us meet a lot of investors and finally raise investment for the studio. There hasn't been much help on the game design side from the accelerator folks though.

**Often when I write emails to people for hiring, they somehow think I am in charge of HR and not the CEO and Founder of the company.**

**There are many countries using tax breaks and other incentives to attract video game companies. What are some benefits of making a video game in India?**

Most benefits are the same as the ones given to IT/software companies—nothing specific for the games sector as of now. However, individual state governments—including Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka—have tax write-offs for gaming sector.

**Given your experience as a game developer, do you have any advice that you would offer to women interested in entering the gaming industry?**

Often when I write emails to people for hiring, they somehow think I am in charge of HR and

**I would advise women entering the industry to just ignore the bullshit when it is irrelevant and voice your concerns when it's relevant. Be confident of your skills and don't let petty issues affect your work. Your work will speak the most and shut others up.**

not the CEO and Founder of the company. It's just a preconceived notion.

I get LinkedIn requests saying I am a cute programmer. When things like that happen, our industry suffers from it deep within. I would advise women entering the industry to just ignore the bullshit when it is irrelevant and voice your concerns when it's relevant. Be confident of your skills and don't let petty issues affect your work. Your work will speak the most and shut others up.



**Claire Chen**  
**Keitai Co., Ltd.,**  
**Founder, Director**

COUNTRY: Taiwan  
YEARS OF INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: 10  
FAVORITE GAME: *Animal Crossing*

**When did you know that you wanted to get into game development?**

Actually, the thought of being a game developer never entered in my life. I didn't even have a gaming console until I was 28 years old!

I didn't have a good experience with video games in the past time because many people didn't think girls could play games, and they didn't let me touch the machine. So I could only watch the others play *Super Mario* on the screen without trying it with my own hands.

Then I met my partner, Neil. He told me that "everyone should play games" and gave me a Game Cube as a gift. This made me realize that there are varieties of games. I enjoy the time playing games myself and also love the atmosphere of having fun in game together. Especially, I love the smiles on our faces when we play a game together.

I told Neil that I would like to make games that could bring a similar joy to others. He didn't laugh at my thought like others had before. In addition, he helped me take the first step to start developing my first game. By learning how to make a game from Neil, I started my journey into game development.

**It is one thing to want to be involved in game production. It is an entirely different challenge to run a studio. What has it been like being the director of Keitai?**

It is hard being a female game developer.

As a female director, it is especially hard to convince others to work with us. Compounding this is that I didn't have any working experience in a game company or a bachelor's degree from a university. What I do have is the enthusiasm for playing games and the will to execute a plan.

In order to persuade or communicate with others, I've learned basic programming and art design. It was a really a hard challenge for me since I didn't have any background related to game development. Being like a newbie in game development is painful but full of fun. I must say hello to strangers to collect information, go to the right place to return the quest, find friends and partners, raise my levels and beat the final fiend.

Life itself is a marvelous adventure, and as a female game director I am fully engaged in it.

**Taiwan has some of the fastest internet speeds in the world. How does this impact the way Keitai develops games?**

The fast network speeds in Taiwan makes it easier for Keitai to get information from users, and it helps us create more joyful and valuable games on mobile devices.

On the other hand, network speeds became an interesting issue for us when we started promoting Keitai in countries lesser network-ing environments. How could we design a sim-pler game to adapt to the low-speed environ-ment? Should we develop a new game version which makes use of the internet only as an optional add-on or an extra bonus?

No matter how the environment is, Keitai believes that everyone needs a joyful game in their life, and we will do our best to provide that.

**I didn't have a good experience with video games in the past time because many people didn't think girls could play games, and they didn't let me touch the machine. So I could only watch the others play *Super Mario* on the screen without trying it with my own hands.**

#### **What was the inspiration for creating *Rocket Cube*?**

People nowadays are familiar with match-three games—the most popular casual game genre in the world. *Tetris*, one of the most famous games, was created in 1984. And it had been a classic game that people will never forget it. We felt that mixing classic games like *Tetris* with the most familiar rules would create a simple yet exciting challenge.

The original concept of *Rocket Cube* comes from the Olympics. We love the elements of grouping, sharing, playing and competing. Before developing *Rocket Cube*, we found that there are types of players who intend to focus on cooperation more than competition in a game. This discovery became a priority for *Rocket Cube's* game design. So in order to ex-

cite players' enthusiasm, Keitai tries to create an atmosphere of belonging for the players.

#### **What suggestions would you offer women trying to enter the industry?**

I would like to share the insight I've gained with all the women who would like to enter this industry.

The world is bigger than our own imagination. And of course, it should be full of different points of view. Don't you think that the world is like a game? We should play games with joy! Don't you think that daily life itself is a game? Of course we can make it!

When it comes to life itself, there is no difference between men and women. We don't need anyone's permission to live. So just be yourself. Don't be shy or afraid of presenting your own thought and ability just because you are female. We have our special points of view to share with the world.

So don't feel alone, because there are more and more women becoming game developers around the world. All of us will support you and your dream.



**Meri Rosich**  
**Quality-Time Lab,**  
**CEO/Founder**

COUNTRY: Singapore  
YEARS OF INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: 4  
(mobile games)  
FAVORITE GAME: recently, *Leo's Fortune* is gorgeous

#### **What attracted you to video game development?**

Games and apps are a personal passion. My background is in technology, product management, and marketing, so when I had an idea to

solve a real problem it seemed natural to build an app. Developing has become more com-moditized in the past two years so that anyone with an idea can find developers to code it. The challenge is finding a good problem to solve and marketing it well.

**Just be yourself. Don't be shy or afraid of presenting your own thought and ability just because you are female. We have our special points of view to share with the world.**

#### **As a Spaniard who was educated in London and now lives in Singapore, do you think Singapore offers any unique advantages for game developers that other countries lack?**

Every country offers different advantages for developers. Some value access to funding, others a strong talent pool or language skills. Singapore is great for startups because setting up companies is fast and efficient. Corporate tax is low and the government has created a best-practice ecosystem for startups (including grants and incubators) that is ripe for talent to start building innovative products.

#### **What was the inspiration for founding Quality Time Lab?**

Quality Time makes apps that bring people together. It was born in late 2011, when I became frustrated with my young kids' lack of interest in family video calls with the grandparents. I did some research among young families and everyone seemed to have the same problem. Having worked in technology for years, I decided to find a solution: bringing rich content to video calls to entertain, educate, and inspire kids in order to build strong family ties.

The first product was launched at Demo Asia in 2012. It was a Skype plug-in for desktop computers that grew quickly to 50,000 customers before Skype closed the developers program after the Microsoft acquisition. Later it became a plugin for G+ Hangouts video calls and received great feedback from customers,

especially grandparents and long-distance families. So the model was validated and it was time to move to mobile devices with *Dinner Time*.

Don't feel alone,  
because there are  
more and more  
women becoming  
game developers  
around the world.  
All of us will support  
you and your dream.

At dinner is when most families spend time together, followed by the bedtime routines in young families. The problem we wanted to solve is: What happens when we work late or travel and can't make it home for dinner? One day I looked through the window and saw my neighbor eating with a tablet on the table during a video call. When I asked him about it, he explained that after his divorce he agreed to spend dinnertime with his son using a tablet. I found it moving and powerful, but when we tried it with younger kids we realized we needed to add some fun to keep their attention. With *Dinner Time*, families can eat together virtually during a video call, celebrate birthdays with a cute birthday cake or have turkey for Thanksgiving. It also allows parents to read a bedtime story when they are away and perform other habits and family routines during video calls.

**Given how competitive the market for family friendly apps is, what tactics has Quality Time Lab deployed to help it stand above the competition?**

Quality Time Lab's core tactic is to stay close to customers and listen exhaustively to understand what families want and how they use apps. Surprisingly enough, there are not many family apps. Children's games are saturated and competitive, and the recently created "family" category has quickly filled with casual games, but there is just a handful of developers that focus on what families need and help them solve real problems such as family relationships and parenting. My area of interest is to create apps that bring people together, using digital toys or communication win-

dows that help us build quality time moments with our loved ones.

**As a Managing Director at App Strategy Labs, you have mentored some tech companies. What are some common mistakes you think newer companies frequently make?**

Ideally companies should spend one-third of time and investment on each phase: strategy, development, and marketing. But most companies focus 99% of their time and investment on app development and 1% on marketing—skipping the planning phase.

If an app is rushed into development without proper research and segmentation, they may end up with a product that appeals to the wrong demographic, being marketed with the a business model that does not appeal to them. When the app shows little traction, they focus on incentivizing downloads to hit targets. Today 1% of developers make 98% of revenue, and that will have to change to create the right ecosystem and enable the best creativity to flourish.

**You are an ambassador for Women in STEM and a lead in The Founding Moms Exchange for Singapore's branch. What are some changes you think the tech industry could make to become more welcoming to women?**

I enjoy mentoring women in technology through STEM programs because I want the next generation to be more diverse and equally represented. On many occasions I find myself being the only woman in the room, and it does not make sense for any industry to miss 50% of the brain power and perspective. Particularly in startups there are many myths to dispel, such as that founders must be technical. Being a woman without a technical degree, I found myself having to bring up my PhD in 3D technology just to be able

Strategic thought,  
analytic skills, and  
especially developer  
marketing are core  
for startup founders  
today, and those are  
skills where women  
have a great natural fit.

to sit at the table and be heard. I was also led to believe that I needed a techie co-founder, but I soon realized that because all the technical decisions are based on new information, the ability to learn was far more important than any old tech degrees. Strategic thought, analytic skills, and especially developer marketing are core for startup founders today, and those are skills where women have a great natural fit.

**Looking back at your career, what are some tips you could offer women now entering the tech industry?**

Women entering the tech industry should know that tech is just as complex, fascinating and difficult as any other industry. They should demystify it as a techie guys space because there are lots of amazing women out there doing an incredible job. I have lots of great sto-

I have lots of great  
stories, but the truth  
is there is no magic—  
just vision, intelligent  
persistence, good  
storytelling, and  
being a great  
professional to get  
things done. Anyone  
with a great idea  
should be able to  
bring it to market.

ries, but the truth is there is no magic—just vision, intelligent persistence, good storytelling, and being a great professional to get things done. Anyone with a great idea should be able to bring it to market.

I would recommend trusting their instincts and learning the basics first. Pick your first company and boss carefully, because that will set the basis for your own management style. I have been lucky to have amazing bosses who helped me learn and grow as a professional and as a person, so choosing a company with the right culture is very important—both in startups and in larger organizations. \*



# Fiksu for Facebook



The industry's most advanced mobile media buying and optimization technology for Facebook.

Drive higher volumes of mobile app installs and higher ROI on Facebook with Fiksu's programmatic media buying.



Ads API Partner

US 1.855.463.4578 | [sales@fiksu.com](mailto:sales@fiksu.com)  
EMEA +44 208 434 7051 | [sales-emea@fiksu.com](mailto:sales-emea@fiksu.com)  
APAC +65 6372 9538 | [sales-apac@fiksu.com](mailto:sales-apac@fiksu.com)  
[www.fiksu.com](http://www.fiksu.com)

# Giving 800 Percent

## The Rise of Glitchsoft

With massive change comes a lot of opportunity and if you can ride that change, you can be in a great position to be a leader in the industry.

**Glitchsoft was founded in 2009, and in its** short life it has created a state-of-the-art development tool and several popular mobile games—two of which are based on popular franchises. To understand Glitchsoft's beginnings and how it competes in the mobile market, we discussed the studio's background and unique approach to game development with the company's CEO, Andrew Fisher.



### The Origin of Glitchsoft

The Wesley Clover Group was created in 1975 to help facilitate an investment in the telecom industry that would allow the Mitel Corporation to create tone receiver technology that enabled the industry to move away from rotary dial phones. Building on this success in the 1970s, Wesley Clover continued to grow by investing in startups and other small companies. Wesley Clover describes itself as “a serial Super Angel, starting companies by providing seed, early stage and follow-on financing.” With mobile gaming increasing in the early 2000s, it would only be a matter of time before it caught the attention of Wesley Clover.

Thus it was that a group of industry veterans, working with Wesley Clover, established Glitchsoft in 2009. “The mobile video game industry is growing rapidly,” says Fisher. “It is projected to be worth \$23.9 billion by 2016. This growth is causing a major shift in the sector. It is not just about producing games for a mobile platform, it is about driving engagement with a brand. With massive change comes

a lot of opportunity and if you can ride that change, you can be in a great position to be a leader in the industry.”

Glitchsoft was staffed by video game fans with an affection for classic games. “We’re big fans of the classic gaming history,” says Fisher, “so for us it was natural to focus on the side-scrolling genre. Side scrolling is the origin of a lot of video games themselves, classics like *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.*” Rather than try to battle it out as a generalist in an over-crowded marketplace, Glitchsoft chose rather to become the very best within the side-scrolling niche.

As the company began to develop its public image, it’s love of classic games began to shape how it interacted with fans inside and outside of their games. “We are nostalgic, old school gamers,” Fisher says. “It’s not that we don’t like or play modern games but most of our early experiences and first impressions were from playing old-school games. The very first game I ever played was a coin-operated *Pong* game—essentially at the birth of video games.” For Fisher, it was the “Easter eggs or glitches that made playing games like *Super Mario* really fun—like finding those tubes that took you to unlimited coins or those secret ladders into the clouds. They were the ‘holy cow’ moments that you tell your friends about and you all get excited.”

This love of Easter eggs inspired Glitchsoft to litter their *Uncanny X-Men* with extra features. “If you are a completionist or like finding those secrets,” he says, “you are going to uncover all kinds of surprises in *Uncanny X-Men*.” Glitchsoft also creates blog posts that are often about their favorite classic Easter egg, glitch, or cheat codes. Though a small part of their business practice, it allows them to engage fans on a more personal level.

## Building the Helios Platform

From the beginning, Glitchsoft wanted to be known for quickly producing high-quality content. To accomplish this goal, Glitchsoft invested heavily in developing its own mobile engagement platform that would become known as the Helios Platform.

Glitchsoft's primary goal for Helios was to create programs that could easily exist on different devices. "The Helios Platform was born out of years of frustration in designing for mobile phones," Fisher explains. "A lot of our founding team started programming for feature phones, where it was incredibly restrictive and... extremely costly. There were hundreds of feature phones; it is not like today when you have Apple and Android, so there was a huge porting challenge."

It doesn't hurt, of course, that Glitchsoft has been able to generate profit by licensing Helio for international ventures. By partnering with other companies in this manner, the studio is able "to have a geographic expansion model into countries such as China, Brazil, and India much faster than we would if we were to build from scratch." Licensing Helios



Glitchsoft;  
Kanata, ON

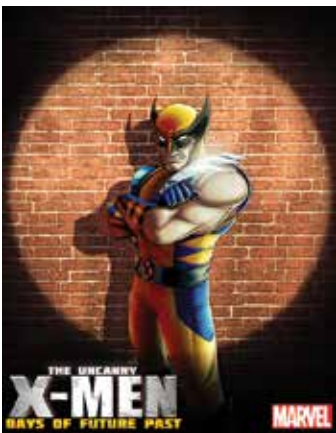
We picked a cause that we believe in and support," says Fisher, "and we wrote a game that correlates with that cause. *Destructopus* is about saving the environment, the animals, and the world.





is also true to Wesley Clover Group's history of helping entrepreneurs. Helios "helps the entrepreneurs we partner with to get up and running faster," says Fisher. "They can hit the ground knowing that there is already a tool set, a procedure and possibly an

**To oversimplify: Glitchsoft got this project by calling Marvel and meeting with them until a deal was reached. And let's just say that Marvel doesn't simply pick up the phone every time it gets a call from a studio staffed with a bunch of X-Men fans.**



existing game shell to work on. From an investor's perspective that means faster time to generating revenue."

Helios has become a differentiator that has enabled Glitchsoft to win some key projects. In one instance, Helios helped the studio prototype a working model in just two weeks.

### First Steps into Gaming

Glitchsoft's first true game was called *BarStar*. The game was all about turning a rundown bar into an upscale lounge. Players had to get through 35 levels by hiring new staff, improving the layout of the place, and, well, occasionally dealing with zombies. *BarStar* proved to be a hit that helped Glitchsoft find itself early on.

Glitchsoft's second game, *Destructopus*, was designed in an attempt to "ride other marketing events in order to drive our discoverability." Released in May 2011, *Destructopus* was developed in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. "We picked a cause that we believe in and support," says Fisher, "and we wrote a game that correlates with that cause. *Destructopus* is about saving the environment, the animals, and the world. It is about fighting back against pollution and big corporations."

While *Destructopus* got a lot of fan recognition early on, it wasn't until years later that it really helped Glitchsoft earn key development contracts. "Recognition for *Destructopus* didn't come along until later," Fisher says. "When we were negotiating with another triple-A brand, we were discussing our company with their head of games. When we mentioned *Destructopus* he said, 'you built *Destructopus*? I didn't know that. I love that game.' In just a couple of minutes, we went from being an unknown entity to being the team behind a game the main decision-maker loved."

Glitchsoft's next game was released in January 2012. "If you asked most old school or classic video game fans what their favorite game is, they will like-

ly say *Contra*," says Fisher. Glitchsoft created *Star Marine* to be a nostalgic shout-out to "fans that loved it as much as we do and who hopefully wanted to consume more of it on a modern platform." Fisher admires that *Contra* was so hard that people became obsessed with completing it. He also loved the various glitches which led to special cheat codes (of course). Although layering *Star Marine* with cheat codes "didn't work quite as well in the touch environment" as it did in *Contra* and similar games, Fisher and Glitchsoft's team were pleased that it earned enough positive reviews that it ranked as one of the top 10 mobile games that year. What's more, Fisher says, "it is the reason why we caught Mattel's attention."

### Getting Noticed

The call from Mattel came just two weeks after the launch of *Star Marine*. Mattel invited Glitchsoft to put in a proposal for an upcoming He-Man game. Taking on a character with such history and brand depth was a significant challenge, of course. For instance, with so many versions of He-Man over the years, Glitchsoft "went through 20 iterations of the art style before we figured out the one we really wanted to go with." After testing their initial designs with fans and other stakeholders, Fisher says that they decided to "cartoonify He-Man, making him short and stubby. But we hammed it up so much throughout the game that fans forgave us for making him a bit stubby."

When deciding which elements of He-Man's expansive universe to bring into the game, the team looked for something that would be "contextual in a mobile environment; something that hit the brand highlights and allowed us to take advantage of the classic scenarios like Castle Grayskull and Eternia." Wanting to have this 2D side-scroller begin with a sense of fun, *He-Man: The Most Powerful Game in the Universe* begins with Skeletor challenging He-Man to a videogame.

When it released *He-Man: The Most Powerful Game in the Universe* (in October, 2012 for iOS and August, 2013 for Android), Glitchsoft had to deal with the hardware fragmentation of Android devices. Even with the help of Helios, Glitchsoft still faced porting challenges. According to Fisher, "Helios is written with C++ so the central code compiles with any environment, which means the core of the game is really portable. The part that is device-specific is the part that talks to the display, input and output drivers." So even with the help of Helios, "the fragmentation of Android meant we had to do a lot of versions."

It is a lesson in production that would shape how Glitchsoft developed their next game.



With *Uncanny X-Men* we wanted to pay homage to the original comic book series because it is what we love. It is what the core X-Men fans love.



## A Growing Reputation

Released in May 2014, *The Uncanny X-Men: Days of Future Past* highlights the studio's growing reputation in the game development world. To oversimplify: Glitchsoft got this project by calling Marvel

and meeting with them until a deal was reached. And let's just say that Marvel doesn't simply pick up the phone every time it gets a call from a studio staffed with a bunch of X-Men fans.

Even so, for this group of fans it worked. But instead of making a game based on 2014's *X-Men: Days of Future Past* film, Glitchsoft chose to use the original comic book source material—both visual and narrative—from 1981. “We are a nostalgic group,” Fisher explains.

“With *Uncanny X-Men* we wanted to pay homage to the original comic book series because it is what we love. It is what the core X-Men fans love.” Then he adds: “A lot of times licensed products or

stories are changed and re-told to fit a mass audience. We didn't want to do that; we wanted to reach the core fans that have the knowledge of the brand and know the storylines and characters.”

To bring the retro artwork up to modern mobile gaming standards the team started out with a 2D look and then added “more depth through layered parallaxing to look 3D.” After several iterations of this layered look, Glitchsoft was able to create modern animation while remaining true to the style of a comic book.

Being faithful to the original comic books also provides Glitchsoft access to something missing in many games: a diverse cast of female characters. Consequently, Glitchsoft's latest version of *Uncanny X-Men* has four females and only three male playable characters (Wolverine, Colossus, Cyclops, Storm, Kitty Pryde, Polaris, and Scarlet Witch).

Having learned from the development of *He-Man*, Glitchsoft also had a better plan in place to produce *Uncanny X-Men* for different platforms. “What we learned,” says Fisher, “was that you need to be cautious and only go out with a game when the quality is there. We launched *Uncanny X-Men* on iOS. We followed that by releasing on Amazon







and we'll follow that with Google Play." In short, Glitchsoft learned to "only release a game once it has been tested and proven to be stable on the target devices."

### Lessons Learned

With a resurgence of entrepreneurship in North America, Glitchsoft's growth provides several lessons that many others can learn from. One that stands out to Fisher is that no matter how hard one thinks it will be, the reality is far worse. "It is harder than you think it is going to be when you start," he says. "The market is very competitive. It requires a constant grind of long hours and dedication. Sometimes you have been 10 days doing something and then you have to throw it all away because it isn't working. That is tough because you feel like you are making progress and then you have to take three steps back in order to move forward."

It was also difficult when the studio started getting its first wave of feedback from customers—particularly because people with negative experiences always then to be more vocal than people with positive experiences. "Customers can be hard on you," Fisher says. "The difficult ones are heartbreaking

because they just rip holes in you and tell you that you are awful. But then you have the fans that tell you that your game is the most wonderful thing ever, and that is pretty great."

Above all, Fisher has come to understand the importance of people and culture. "It is about the people," Fisher says. "It is really important to have a culture that supports and recognizes the people and provides them with an environment that allows them to be excellent. If you can do those things, you can differentiate yourself on that alone. It can be the difference between winning and losing." Fisher believes that ultimately the people and culture at Glitchsoft are its most important assets. "My job as the CEO is to ensure the culture is maintained, that it is a healthy culture and one that is productive and that ensures we are getting the most out of team members. I always look at it as a good team will pull at a 100%, a bad team will pull at a -50% and a great team will pull at 800%. And the difference between those is the morale. We like to turn the dial so that we are at 800%. That's really easy to say and hard to do."

Somehow, one suspects, Glitchsoft will continue to find a way. ✱

**A good team will pull at a 100%, a bad team will pull at a -50% and a great team will pull at 800%. And the difference between those is the morale. We like to turn the dial so that we are at 800%.**

# Can Live Competitive Gaming Thrive on Mobile?

## Core Mobile eSports

**We have entered the age of eSports**—competitive video games that are played (sometimes professionally) and streamed or broadcasted live for the benefit of fans around the world. *League of Legends*, *Counterstrike* and *Starcraft* have become the dominant forces in this emerging space, with competitive leagues and major sponsors lending them additional legitimacy.



But the question remains: Can eSports go mobile? There are certainly a number of developers and investors hoping to become the *League of Legends* of mobile devices, with massive money and talent going into the companies best situated to achieve that

goal. If savvy industry veterans such as Kristian Segerstrale and companies like Nexon are throwing their weight behind this idea, you should be able to assume that it has legs, right? But does it? At Cliffhanger, we also have been exploring mobile eSports ourselves, and we actually launched our cross-platform game, *Ærena - Clash of Champions*, with the clear goal of becoming one of the players in that space.

In this article I will try to present a few of the conditions governing the creation of eSports games on mobile platforms along with some insights and hard data we already gained from our game. Even if your experience is somewhat different than ours, I hope that our experience can—at a minimum—lay the groundwork for an active discussion and exchange of ideas around the topic.

### Obstacles to Success

When Cliffhanger Productions began working on our eSports game, you could already sense that we were entering an increasingly difficult mobile and F2P market following the rapid decline of the social games gold rush. At that time we were hunting for the elusive mid-core gamer (prior to *Clash of Clans*) and trying to broaden our game's market by aiming at

truly cross-platform game-play (including PC). When we entered alpha stage we saw that several other companies had similar ideas and aspirations. And apparently all of us saw similar issues with transferring to the MOBA genre.

Here are the top things we identified as potential challenges along with ways we set about to answer those challenges:

### 1. **Short Session**

Data has already shown that the famous three-minute session is not the actual norm on mobile devices—especially on tablets, which have more of the “sofa-session” use case. However, the *idea* of having to engage only for a short period is important for people to even begin playing a mobile game, so it was clear that a 45-to-60-minute match (which is the duration of many *LoL* games) would not be feasible. We defined six-to-seven minutes as acceptable and 10 as a maximum time for our game, and that was one of the conditions that determined the design.

### 2. **Critical Mass**

Not in the chart-listing sense, but in the pure meaning of being able to find a match quickly against live players. If it takes five minutes to find a match and a session should last only seven minutes, there isn't much time left for gaming. This was one of the reasons why we wanted to go cross-platform: We could mix and match sources of traffic and wouldn't lose players who were switching between gaming devices.

### 3. **Live Multiplayer**

To this day many mobile companies doubt the feasibility of live multiplayer, as it reduces the convenience of the mobile game. The common problems of mobile—contending with lags, switching network access spots, being distracted by calls or other interruptions—are especially detrimental to live multiplayer. So it was crucial that we turn match starts into quick and convenient actions and make communication in a match really easy. But the widest-ranging decision we took was to go turn-based. With one stroke we eliminated latency issues and mid-play interruptions while mitigating the unfair advantages that PC players would otherwise enjoy against mobile players (due to keyboard/mouse game controls, stable internet access, and large screens). So then all we had to figure out how to keep players from getting bored while waiting for their turn.



by Jan Wagner;  
Co-Founder; Cliffhanger  
Productions Games  
Vienna, Austria

### 4. **Focus**

In an ongoing live game—even a turn-based one—you must concentrate if you want to be successful. You need to think ahead, react to your enemy, and devise your tactics. The classic mobile titles play in short, intense bursts, but having to stay alert for an extended time period is a challenge. That's another reason we chose turn-based game-play: It is a bit more forgiving and better suited for the mobile experience.

### 5. **Skill**

Competitive games are all about skill and strategy—not only in MOBAs or shooters. Add a team-versus-team component and things get really tough. Facing other, potentially superior players can be frustrating and create a caustic atmosphere within the community, especially when games begin to tilt in one side's favor and the other side has little choice but to sit and watch their own destruction (which often leads to rage quits). The flipside of that experience is often no better for the winning player who is denied the satisfaction of victory when another player quits partway through a game. This threat of mismatched opponents weighs especially heavily on mobile, where session time is limited. So we designed an inverse power mechanic: The more you get pummeled, the more powerful your potential to create game-changing effects. To this day our rage quits are

There are certainly a number of developers and investors hoping to become the *League of Legends* of mobile devices, with massive money and talent going into the companies best situated to achieve that goal.



below 5% since matches are often so close at the end that both players come away thinking that the outcome could have gone either way.

## 6. Narrative

eSports require narratives to provide structure for the build-up, mid-game, and end-game—



The *idea* of having to engage only for a short period is important for people to even begin playing a mobile game, so it was clear that a 45-to-60-minute match (which is the duration of many *LoL* games) would not be feasible.

and for the emotional journey of a player and audience as victory or defeat are just a split-second decision apart. Without that clear narrative, without the suspense, the genre has little attraction. Very few people would like to watch guys with Excel tables challenge each other with the results calculated automatically.

For that narrative to be compelling, you need to be able to *see* what is going on in the field of play—which makes screen-size an essential consideration in the development of a game for eSports. To make the action-narrative understandable, therefore, you need two things: a) Limit the amount of things going on (so there is a clear focus on the action taking place); and b) make the entire playing field visible without scrolling. In our game, the entire *aerena* fits on a mobile screen, and we use a limited number of characters to help people focus on the action.

## 7. Audience

Without someone watching, eSports are just multiplayer games. Live streaming or broadcasting on mobile is a challenge. Even match-recording and sharing are still in their infancy, though solutions like Everyplay have been working to change that. This is also why we thought that being able to run the game on PC would play into our hands, though to this day we have to

implement an in-game method of recording the game and broadcasting a match, which is one of the top things we still need to do.

So with a view to overcoming all those obstacles, here is our game in a nutshell:

*Aërena* was originally conceived as *LoL*-meets-speed-chess-in-an-*Aetherpunk*-universe. Two players face off with three champions to a side. Each champion is selected from your roster and each has a unique set of abilities and powers. As in chess, you move your champions with the goal of destroying the enemy, which you can do either by killing off the other guy's champions or destroying his base. Similar to *League of Legends*, hit points, range, and special skills consume Aether (our universal energy source) and make each champion play differently. Your bases can fire up to three shells, which adds to the complexity of the strategic options available in any given game.

## A Look at the Data

*Aërena* has been launched across Android, iOS, PC/Mac on Steam and as a browser version in selected countries—including Korea, China, USA and South East Asia. The length of sessions and their frequency is not dramatically different across devices. This stays true even when we separate phones and tablets, with an average of 27 minutes on tablets and 24 minutes on phones.

### SESSION LENGTH AND INTENSITY

	Desktop	Android	iOS
Average matches per session	2.86	1.92	1.83
Average session length	28.87	25.44	24.86

What differs remarkably is the *intensity* of play. In roughly the same time desktop users play three matches, mobile gamers play two—and this is true for both tablets and phones. Considering that the devices have exactly the same multi-platform match-making, the difference lies solely in the use-case. We assume that mobile players have more distractions when not in a match and also are less clear in what they want to play. This is important since it

shows one of the main obstacles to eSports on mobile: Focus (or lack of).

Now this does not mean that mobile players cannot be competitive—some of our top players on the leader boards are playing on tablets and even phones—but it does show that players currently still approach mobile games differently. The same is true for the way they play: While 60% of PC games are multiplayer, 65% of mobile games are single-player matches against AI. During first sessions, it takes mobile players almost twice the amount of sessions to move towards a multiplayer match compared to PC.

According to our data and some research we did into our player demographics, a good number of our players play MOBAs and *Hearthstone* (no surprise there). However, even those players change their behavior on mobile devices and are less likely, for example, to risk a ranked match (which would affect their overall leader board score), although they are aware they are not at a disadvantage technically. It simply seems to be a question of commitment level being different depending on the device. This changes a bit when their primary playing device is a tablet: Then they will be more likely to emulate a pattern we see on PC.

With our Korean users, we can see that their behavior is already much closer to PC—not only in the matches-per-session numbers, but also in the retention, willingness to play competitively and conversion to paying. Since mobile gaming, competitive gaming, and mobile network speed and availability are further advanced in Korea, this could be seen as a glimpse into the future in the Western markets.

### Are eSports on Mobile Sustainable?

One of the core issues for anyone getting into eSports has to be whether a prolonged interest is sustainable. While there are many games trying to get there, the eSports scene needs to actually be interested in picking a game up—which usually takes time if you are not already a hugely successful and well-established company and game brand. Yes, you can do tournaments with money prizes, but that does not mean you will fill stadiums with your audience. The players need to want to come and they need to find a well-balanced game that has no strong pay-to-win mechanics. They also need to stream or otherwise be able to review and spread matches so that they can see if it makes sense to invest their time. As someone said: “eSports have to come to you.”

New mobile titles push away established titles much more quickly than new PC titles do ones—which means that it is much harder to obtain and sustain a “grassroots” movement for your mobile eSports game. The time-honored principle of burst campaigns is not only getting madly expensive, it is also useless if you want to cultivate a growing eSports audience—





unless you can keep it up for a good long while. Even excellent games, such as the tablet-focused MOBA *Vainglory* by Super Evil Megacorp, have found their soft launch in Southeast Asia subject to the quick ups and downs of the chart positions despite excellent ratings and plenty of financial support.

any “tablet only” title, which has to compete with casual games on phones for rankings.

With *Ærena* we seem to be on a good route. We have managed to level the playing field across devices, we have found a lot of players who play us as their secondary game “between” a match of *DotA* or *LoL*.

We’ve started working with the ESL to prepare an actual *Ærena* Cup and reach out to players, and we have a few people starting to stream matches on Twitch. We also have been able to gather some street cred in the eSports scene.

There is more to do, of course. We have learned a lot of things we want to apply down the road. But it is still difficult: visibility, technology (hello, 8,500th Android device) and critical mass are something we have struggled with since launch, and self-publishing is a tough job. Yet over 500,000 players and some top chart rankings encourage us to move forward where some of the games that tried similar things have fallen by the wayside.



Sustaining a title for long enough to just open the possibility of it becoming an eSports title is a marathon—anyone wishing to go there must be in for a long haul. And as long as mobile and tablet charts are treated like the Android one (and really, how would you be able to differentiate between phablets, tablets etc.), this will also be a major problem for

**The reduced focus on mobile devices, the requirement to put players on equal footing with regards to network connection, and the obstacles to streaming are all inhibiting the potential of eSports.**

### **eSports in the Future**

With all those obstacles, is there really a place for eSports on mobile? We believe so—but in the same vein as playing football (or soccer for our American readers) in the schoolyard or the park as opposed to the Premier League, it may be more of an access point into professional gaming. The reduced focus on mobile devices, the requirement to put players on equal footing with regards to network connection, and the obstacles to streaming are all inhibiting the potential. But think about the potential in a different way—not as an emulation of PC-based eSports, but as a huge space for an amateur movement that allows players to dabble in eSports, to get accustomed to it. After all, where are pro teams in sports taking their players from? Why is football/soccer something played by millions globally as opposed to tennis? It’s because there is a huge amount of people playing it casually for fun everywhere, because it is easy to set up a quick game anywhere, anytime. And these are people buying the shirts, shoes and merchandise even if they may not be rabid fans of a specific team.

This is the true potential of mobile eSports: reaching a larger number of players in a different way and allowing them to participate with much lower hurdles than, for example, *League of Legends* poses to new players. Maybe mobile eSports isn’t ready for the pro league just yet, but it sure as hell would be a great place for millions of amateurs! ❄





**GO GLOBAL WITH  
THE RIGHT PUBLISHER**

Contact us at [developers@g5e.com](mailto:developers@g5e.com)

# What Are You Waiting For?

## New Alternatives for Mobile Game Discovery and Monetization

### Where is Sherlock Holmes when we need him?

The years go by, the data and clues pile up, and yet no one—except maybe for a handful of studios with (give or take) a million dollars to spend each day on marketing—has solved the mystery of how to get users—many of them—to discover a brilliant new mobile game. There is no questioning the golden opportunity awaiting the studios that can succeed amongst all the discovery challenges and clutter. Representing one third of the time spent on mobile devices, gaming continues to dominate the mobile user experience and is the only medium through which users (at scale) have shown a propensity to reach into their wallets and buy stuff. Yet, despite mobile users' continued addiction, game studios are

increasingly struggling to build audiences and, ultimately, capture the full value of their games. There are literally thousands of absolutely awesome games in the app stores today that nobody is playing. The app store dead pool is littered with quality content in search of an audience. Connecting that quality content with the right audience has only gotten harder and more expensive.

While the challenge starts with discovery, it is intimately tied to monetization. Today, visibility in native app stores has more or less closed to all but a select few powerhouse studios, sending others on a frustrating hunt for ROI-positive user acquisition strategies. The math is pretty simple. The lifetime value of a new user to your game, typically driven by in-game purchases and advertising, needs to be greater than the cost of acquiring that user. As cost-per-installs rise and new restrictions are placed on tactics like incentivized downloads, the cost of marketing an app is cutting way too deeply into studio earnings; and in most cases, it is eclipsing it, forcing many studios to either shut down or watch their games languish in the app stores.

What if you could get your game played by millions of users without burning dollars? I am going to let you in on a little secret—you can.

### You Can Do This

Alternative methods of distributing and monetizing mobile games are becoming more and more accessible. In particular, the mobile web has emerged as a powerful way for game studios to channel their games to users and leverage that audience to complement their app store strategy.

The future of mobile game discovery lies in extending gaming content (not just an ad for the game)

This HTML5 Happy Tree Friend launch game has received over 400,000 app store downloads with zero upfront marketing cost





outside of the traditional app stores and into user-rich areas like mobile media sites, blogs, social networks, chat services, browser content stores, and even other native apps. Instead of users needing to go to an app store to find games, the games will find the users wherever they are consuming their media. Major media companies, web publishers and game portals that already have large mobile audiences are now looking to further engage their users with native-quality HTML5 game content. Game studios willing to take the plunge and begin developing games in HTML5 have the opportunity to reach millions of users with their games without any upfront marketing costs.

That is because the mobile web eliminates the need to spend upfront dollars on marketing, as the emerging distribution channels for mobile web games work almost exclusively on a revenue-share basis. The real fun begins once your game is being played on the mobile web.

### How It (Already) Works

Here are some examples of strategies being deployed by studios already leveraging the medium:

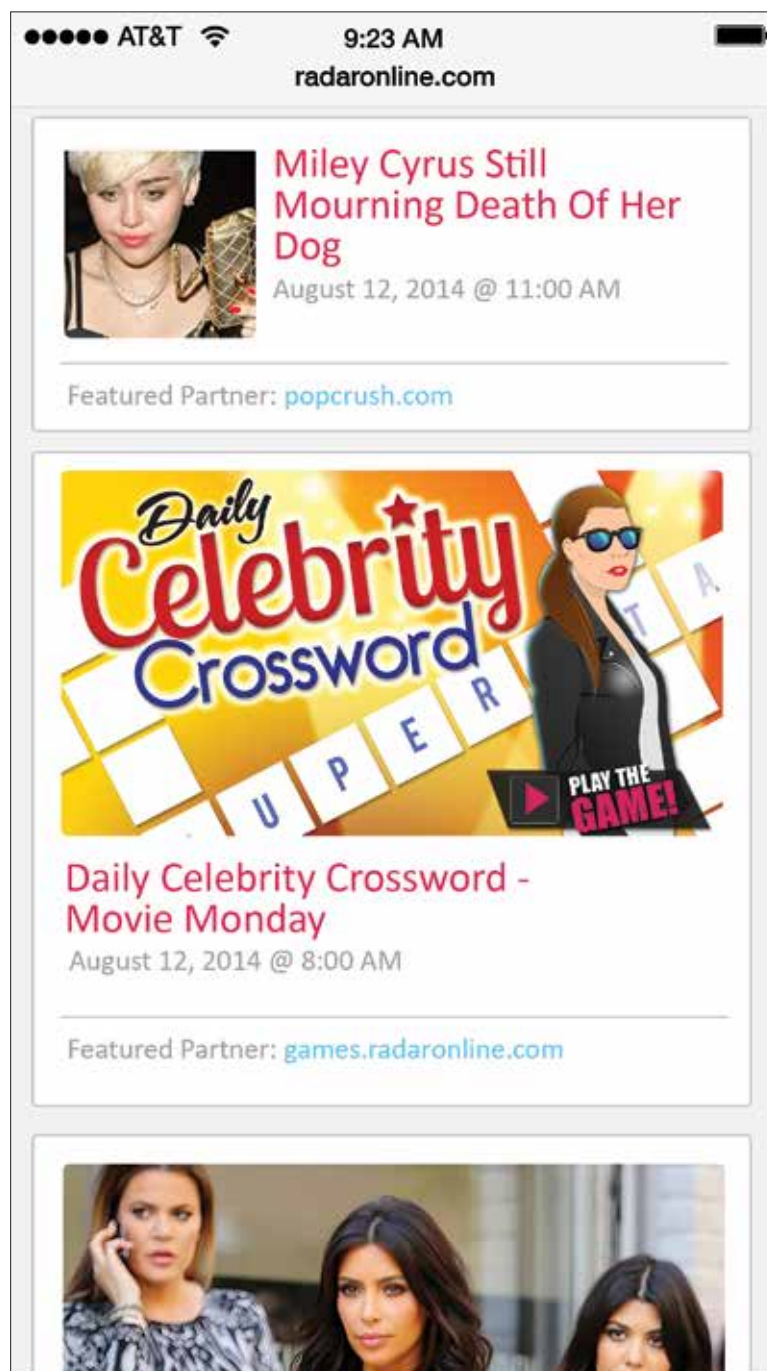
- Studios are actively monetizing the games they are distributing on the mobile web, employing both standard in-game advertising (including banner ads, interstitials, and video ads, all with advanced targeting available), and in-game purchasing (through carrier billing, PayPal and/or credit cards).
- Since an HTML5 game can be easily “wrapped” as a native app for distribution within the app stores, many studios are building their games in HTML5 and leveraging the mobile web to build awareness and drive downloads of the native app version of their game. They do this by simply adding the app store download buttons on the game-over screen of the mobile web version of their game. The game *Stranded*, featuring Mondo Media’s Happy Tree Friend characters, has received close to 400,000 downloads through this mobile web distribution technique without spending a dime on “conventional” marketing.
- Other studios with pre-existing app store games are either porting or creating “lite” versions of their native app games and distributing them on the mobile web to act primarily as a way to drive cost-effective downloads. While the current cost-per-install for a native game is in the \$2.50 to \$5.00 range (USD), the upfront cost to drive mobile web plays through organic and/or paid traffic is a fraction of that, ranging from \$0 (through the emerging revenue share-based mobile web distribution channels)

to around \$0.20 per game play (through more traditional paid traffic solutions). Remember, since the games are HTML5, they can be marketed just like any other form of digital media, including serving the games via an IAB-compliant ad tag where the ad itself is the game. And since the games can come pre-loaded with ads and in-game purchase support, any upfront marketing spend can be offset by revenue generated through mobile web game-play.



by Rob Grossberg;  
CEO, TreSensa;  
New York, NY

This tap-and-play “lite” HTML5 version of a popular native crosswords game is being promoted directly within the news feeds and gaming sections of various media sites.





- Many studios are using the mobile web as an easy and inexpensive way to test concepts and game-play mechanics before investing in the development of a larger game. They can deploy updates to mobile web games and be live in market within an hour or two, making it an ideal platform for rapid prototyping and data-driven tweaking and improvements.

## Mobile web games can be more creative and innovative, as developers no longer have to obsess over pushing their users to a purchase point within game-play simply to recoup their large upfront marketing spends.

To bring the above points to life, here is an example of how PuzzleSocial, a mobile game studio based in New York City, has successfully leveraged the mobile web for its business. PuzzleSocial is the studio behind *Daily Celebrity Crossword*, one of the most successful crossword games in the app stores. This spring PuzzleSocial created an HTML5 version of their game and began testing distribution on the mobile web. In under three months and with a limited rollout, the game generated over 210,000 unique game plays. What's more, roughly 10% of the people playing the HTML5 version of the game on the mobile web then made the decision, completely un-incentivized, to download the full version of the game for permanent residence on their device. This is the ultimate qualified user. And the upfront marketing cost to drive these unique game-plays? Zero.

### Common (Unfounded) Concerns

A common concern of developers is that HTML5 game performance is sub-par and that there are no great development tools around for HTML5 games. No question—native apps offer the best environment to develop a cutting edge game, especially a graphics- and audio-heavy game. But mobile web has come incredibly far in terms of capabilities over the past 12 months, enabling more and more advanced casual games that, to the user, are indistinguishable from a native-built game. And the pace of the advancements is now far faster than anyone would have predicted just a few years back.

For example, in the spring Apple announced that that WebGL would be supported in iOS8 (WebGL is already supported within all other major mobile browsers such as Android, IE and Amazon Silk). WebGL is a Javascript-based advanced graphics API that is part of the HTML5 specification that enables mobile web sites and games to leverage the same

graphics processing power as native mobile apps. Studios can expect at least a 10x performance improvement for 2D graphics in mobile web games, allowing such games to achieve comparable performance power as native games while offering new game features previously impossible on the mobile web, including 3D graphics, image processing, shading and lighting.

As for development tools, better and better commercial engines are emerging to help developers make the move to HTML5. Even Unity has announced that it will be supporting WebGL within Unity 5.0 (set for release this fall), enabling developers to use Unity to develop and publish their titles for the mobile web.

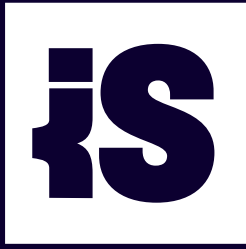
### A Boon for Consumers

How does all of the above translate to the consumer? As mobile web gaming grows, the benefits it offers gamers are becoming increasingly apparent. The mobile web plays on the instant gratification gamers seek when they engage with content. It requires less on behalf of the gamer—no need to commit to downloading a game, no need to wait for the game to download. Switching between different games is effortless, satisfying gamers' demands for a wide variety of snackable and accessible content. Instead of being restricted to a single method of discovery, developers can introduce their games to new players through multiple channels on the mobile web—without expending any additional money or time. This, in turn, means their mobile web games can be more creative and innovative, as developers no longer have to obsess over pushing their users to a purchase point within game-play simply to recoup their large upfront marketing spends.

In a recent study of 230 developers, 9,000 apps and nearly 400 million users, VentureBeat Insights showed that the current approach to cost-per-install campaigns is proving to be the least effective way of building an audience. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that the games themselves are currently tied to the download-driven app store economy, forcing users to install games that they have not yet played, with no guarantee that they will even like them. Because mobile web games are distributed via a URL, gamers are always just one tap away playing your game, at which point you can really start to build your audience and your business.

The time has come for innovative, forward-thinking game studios to gain an early-mover advantage on the emerging mobile web opportunity, which includes driving qualified, ROI-positive native app downloads. All of the evidence is right in front of you. As Sherlock would say, "it's elementary, my dear Watson."

So what are you waiting for? ❄



ironSource

# Digital Distribution, Delivery & Monetization



**mobileCore**

Premium ad network turning great apps  
into scalable businesses



**installCore**

Install-based desktop & cross-platform  
solutions

[www.ironsrc.com](http://www.ironsrc.com)

**VISIT IRONSOURCE AT CASUAL CONNECT BELGRADE 2014, BOOTH 206**

# Gaming Through Decades

## The History of Wayforward Technologies

***"If you know what you love, what you do well, and what your fans want from you, you'll be less likely to go bankrupt."***

**—Voldi Way**

### Getting Started

I had been programming video games as a hobby from the age of nine until finally, on my 20th birthday (1990), I decided to have a go at making a career

out of it. I called my newly-founded company WayForward Technologies partly because my last name is Way, but mainly as a tribute to the Douglas Adams novel, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*—in which a character by the name of Gordon Way has a company called WayForward Technologies.

The first few years were rough, but I eventually had a hit with the *Fun Pack for Windows*. That's when I teamed up with two animators,

Rob Buchanan and Matt Bozon. Rob was our animation director for almost two decades before he left to help Levar Burton reboot *Reading Rainbow*, and Matt is still our Creative Director to this very day. At the time, Rob and Matt were still attending CalArts—an art school founded by Walt Disney for the purpose of training animators in Valencia, California. I moved to Valencia after the 1994 Northridge earthquake caused a freeway to collapse and forced me to share an apartment with Rob and Matt while we finished up a project. Staying in Valencia allowed us to build stronger ties to a community filled with Disney-trained animators who are not only talented, but also familiar with branded content.

Thinking back on this time, it's amazing to see how far we've come. In our the early days, we had to ship our games on 3.5-inch floppy disks, and sound was not a given because most PCs didn't come with speakers. As the industry evolved from floppies to CD-ROM, we had to deal with "no walking around" times. This was because CD-burners in the early 90s were so touchy that heavy footsteps could disrupt the process of writing a program onto a CD. It also took so long that a failed burn might mean a missed milestone. And although we now live in an era when many people have terabytes of storage, WayForward was founded in a time when shaving off one KB of space was a big deal.

### Breaking Through

The *Fun Pack for Windows* was our first commercial success. It sold over a million copies, paving the way for us to enter the 8/16-bit console space. In 1994 we released *Mickey's Ultimate Challenge* for SNES, Genesis, Gameboy and Game Gear. This not only allowed us to work with a known commodity, it helped us form the production roles that would help WayForward grow for the next two decades. Rob was in charge of running animation, Matt was behind the creative design, and I was on programming. More importantly, we worked out many processes that were new at the time but became the standard for indie game production, such as working in tile-sets, building sprites in palettes, and leveraging existing level design tools. Overall, since the budget for *Mickey's Ultimate Challenge* was nearly non-existent, it forced us to learn how to do a lot with a little.

The first game we made that really endeared players to WayForward was *Xtreme Sports* for the Game Boy Color (and recently released on the Nintendo Virtual Console), *Xtreme Sports* introduced players to a new pixel art style, established WayFor-





ward as a handheld powerhouse, and helped pave the way for *Shantae*.

### An Educational Detour

Prior to the release of *Xtreme Sports* in 2000, WayForward took a break from standard video game production to make educational games. This shift was triggered when Brighter Child Interactive acquired a majority stake in WayForward.

The change in direction meant that we missed the N64 and PS1 eras of gaming entirely in favor of CD-ROM content. During this time, the number of games under our belts passed the hundred mark. Our studio became a premier developer for Macromedia by making their tech jump through hoops for which it was never intended. Macromedia and Intel were so impressed with our work that they hired us to create two of the six showcase games for their new Shockwave 3D web platform. This positioned WayForward well for work on many of the first wave of browser games such as *Mattel's Planet Hot Wheels*—an important early web game released in 2000 that allowed players to unlock extras using a code that came included with the retail toy.

During our sojourn through the world of educational gaming, we were able to hone our animation skills and work with established brands such as the Muppets and Marvel Superheroes. This also helped us learn how to cater to our audience and add value to the brands with which we were entrusted. I remember that we took some criticism for making our games a little too hardcore, but we quickly learned to dial it back when dealing with partners who were focused on products for young kids.

### Getting Back To Gaming

In 1997 we renewed our focus on the entertainment segment of gaming. Thanks to the success of *Xtreme Sports*, it wasn't long before we were making games for established properties such as WWF (now WWE), Spongebob, X-Men, Batman, Justice League, Shrek, Godzilla and many more.

Extending brands into the games space proved to have certain distinct challenges. There are specific brand rules for how characters can be portrayed and what actions they can or can't engage in. For example, you might be making a game based on a brand geared toward a very young, female audience. The game may call for enemies and boss battles and for the hero to defeat those other characters, but the brand constraints provide that the character must never perform a violent act. In that case, you might get around it by having her "save" adversaries by making them float away with a beautiful song. Those are the types of situations that arise, but it usually just amounts to altering the narrative of the game-play and not the mechanic. So for example, our female character is still "defeating" her enemies,

but she's doing it in a way that is kinder, gentler, and brand-appropriate. If anything, those sorts of challenges are fun to tackle, because it becomes a bit of a game in and of itself. When making a game based on a brand that already contains a lot of combat and mobility (like Batman or X-Men) there are often



WayForward Technologies;  
Valencia, CA



built-in expectations for character behavior, and it just boils down to specifically which enemies, bosses, and game modes the final game will feature. When adapting a brand that is a 180 degree turn from the play mechanic, that's where things can get pretty interesting.

Over the years we've learned that with any licensed project we always take whatever story and visual material are available and do our best to remain as faithful to the brand as we can— even in those cases, (such as highly-secretive in-production films) when there isn't very much available to work with). We try to envision a game-playing audience that loves these characters, and we try to imagine where they would like to see things go. But, as I said, those things are usually related to the story and narrative of the game.

As for game-play, it's important to create fun and challenging experiences that will hold up even if the person playing has never heard of the property. So if we're making a game based on a brand where the characters don't do much physically, we'll make sure



that there is still an underlying foundation of solid game-play—something that takes the player beyond where the brand would normally go.

Sometimes, the biggest challenge is narrowing down which characters and storylines will make it into our games. For instance, we are huge fans of *Adventure Time*, so when we started work on *Adventure Time: Hey Ice King! Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?!*, the temptation was to try and include just about everything in the cartoon.

### Reboots and *DuckTales*

An outgrowth of working on established intellectual properties is that we regularly work on reboots, such as *Contra 4*, *A Boy and His Blob*, *Double Dragon Neon*, and most recently *DuckTales: Remastered*. Working on these types of projects has taught us that there are really two important aspects of a “reboot.” The first is understanding why a property is beloved and remaining faithful to those elements. The second is making sure that everything we change or add serves to make the game better. Overall, we’ve learned over the years that we can’t just blindly copy an original product and slap new visuals on it because not all of the original game-play is worth preserving. We

have also come to accept the fact that we’ll never end up pleasing 100% of the audience when there’s nostalgia involved. There will always be some element left out that was a favorite of a few fans of the original.

One example of a recent reboot would be *DuckTales: Remastered*. Striking a balance between nostalgia and modern graphics/tech is always a challenge, and this is especially true with a wider fan-base and beloved property like *DuckTales*. We started by discussing with Capcom how close we all felt the game should come to the original. Were we just reskinning levels or were we creating a whole new experience?

In the end, we all decided to keep most of the original designs and game-play mechanics in place, but to extend and improve certain areas (like the mine-cart sequence). We did a rethink on boss battles and even added completely new sections such as the introductory stage in Scrooge’s vault (which also acts as a tutorial). Our goal was to embrace that feeling of nostalgia, but not to the degree where we would be clinging to aspects of the game that could be made better.

The other major consideration on *DuckTales* was the connection between the *DuckTales* NES game and the TV show. Although the original game had no voiceover and was fairly limited on story, we assumed that most of the people with a fondness for the NES game also probably loved the original show. So it was a very natural choice to incorporate VO from the original actors and also to update the character designs as a hybrid of the TV show and the NES game. Being able to revisit not only a classic game, but also a classic cartoon, made the experience twice as fun and provided a level of authenticity that this reboot may not have had if it was done by another studio.

### Genies and Kickstarter

In the early 1990s, Matt and Erin Bozon created the Shantae character while they were students at CalArts. We developed game prototypes featuring Shantae for SNES and PC, but we were never able to find a publisher. At the time, the only female characters in games were Samus, the Guardian (*The Guardian Legend*) and a handful of others.

A female lead was unheard of, and in the end we had to self-fund the game to make it happen. That process took almost eight years because we had to work on the game between the cracks. Our paid gigs always took priority, so *Shantae* frequently got pushed to the backburner until we finally had some breathing room between projects. We were also very interested in bringing rhythm and dance into the world of video games, something that hadn’t been explored much in the NES and SNES days. So an energetic dancing, fighting, hair-whipping genie girl



we felt would contrast well against the other action/adventure mascots of the day. We had plenty of offers that involved dropping the character and putting a “better hero” in her place, but we stuck with our vision and never looked back.

While games centered on female characters have increased tremendously since Shantae first appeared on GameBoy Color in 2002, many publishers are still hesitant to fund these types of projects. Thus, we also had to self-fund Shantae’s second appearance in *Shantae: Risky’s Revenge* and her third appearance in *Shantae and the Pirate’s Curse*.

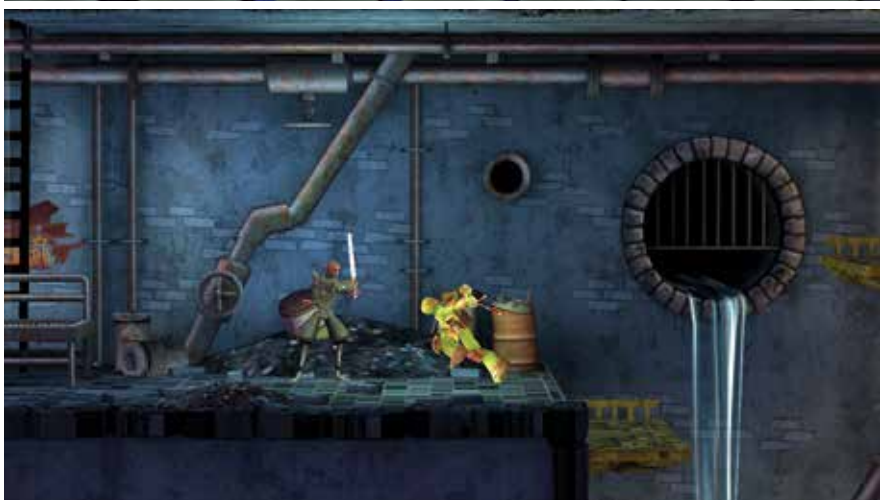
Self-funding pixel-based handheld games is one thing, but on our own we could never afford to bring *Shantae* to HD consoles in glorious high-res 2D. Many people see our portfolio and assume that we are flush with cash, but as a studio that primarily does work for hire, our income from a particular game usually ends the day it ships. The money earned from doing licensed games gets spent on completing those games, along with keeping facilities and staff going. Of course, we love to see our games go on to be hugely successful because it means that players are enjoying our work, but it almost never results in any additional income for us. That’s why we decided to go directly to our fans to ask for help in making Shantae’s fourth installment, and thus launched our Kickstarter for *Shantae: Half-Genie Hero*.

Taking an original project to the public for crowdfunding was a daunting experience, at least initially. Interestingly, the way we pitch games to publishers is not all that different from constructing a Kickstarter campaign. In both situations we need to clearly convey what the game will be and why it’s worth investing in, and then must get people excited to play it. With every project like this there’s always the fear that after you put in that initial effort to launch a campaign it might fall flat. Thanks to the overwhelming, generous contributions from our 20,000+ backers, we ended up more than doubling our \$400k goal for *Half-Genie Hero*, and with the option for fans to donate through PayPal, the amount is still growing.

Beyond this, our current plans for Shantae is to finish her current storyline in the next game, *Shantae and the Pirate’s Curse*. This will allow us, for the first time in decades, to explore completely new plotlines and characters without feeling a need to wrap up loose ends from earlier games.

### Looking Back and Lessons Learned

WayForward has always had a very strong identity with our characters and game-play, and that hasn’t changed all that much over the decades—despite the advancements in technology. By sticking to the same core fundamentals for years we have built up a trust among our fans. They know



what to expect from a WayForward game, regardless of the brand it’s based on or what console it’s designed for. Instead of taking a top-down approach and using the story to determine game-play, we tend to work from the bottom up and define the core game mechanic first and layer characters and story on later.

Another aspect that helped us stay afloat is our willingness to diversify across many different game genres and platforms. We have also learned the importance of working on multiple projects at once. By having a half dozen games in production at any given point, if one gets canceled or delayed for some reason, there will still be others in development to help us continue to make payroll. Oftentimes it seems like game studios will put all their eggs in one basket or try to do only one type of game. It is a philosophy that sets a studio up for failure when that fateful day comes in which nobody wants that type of game anymore. At WayForward, we develop player experiences in nearly every genre, for all ages, and the similarities between all our games aren’t so narrow that they prevent us from always trying new things as we constantly seek to improve ourselves. ❄

**I called my newly-founded company WayForward Technologies partly because my last name is Way, but mainly as a tribute to the Douglas Adams novel, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*.**



# Now We Are Talking

## Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft



Released in the spring of 2014, *Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft* is a digital card game and another addition to Blizzard Entertainment's expanding catalogue of casual/mobile games. Since its release, *Hearthstone* has gained more than 20 million registered accounts—not bad for a few month's work. It made us curious, so to find out more we turned to Eric Dodds, Game Director, and Yong Woo, Senior Producer.

Dodds has been with Blizzard since 1997 and has worked on *StarCraft*, *Diablo*, *Warcraft II: Battle.net*, and several other games before bringing his love of board games to *Hearthstone*. After working for a mobile startup, Woo joined Blizzard in 2009 to work as producer for *StarCraft II*'s art and design team. Both Dodds and Woo are fans of the *World of Warcraft* franchise—and Blizzard's games in general.

"I played the original *StarCraft*," Woo says, "but the game I originally got madly in love with was *World of Warcraft* I was consulting for a while, so I used to be away from home a lot and that was a way I kept up with my family and friends. I have a ton of fun memories of maintaining relationships of people dear to me online."

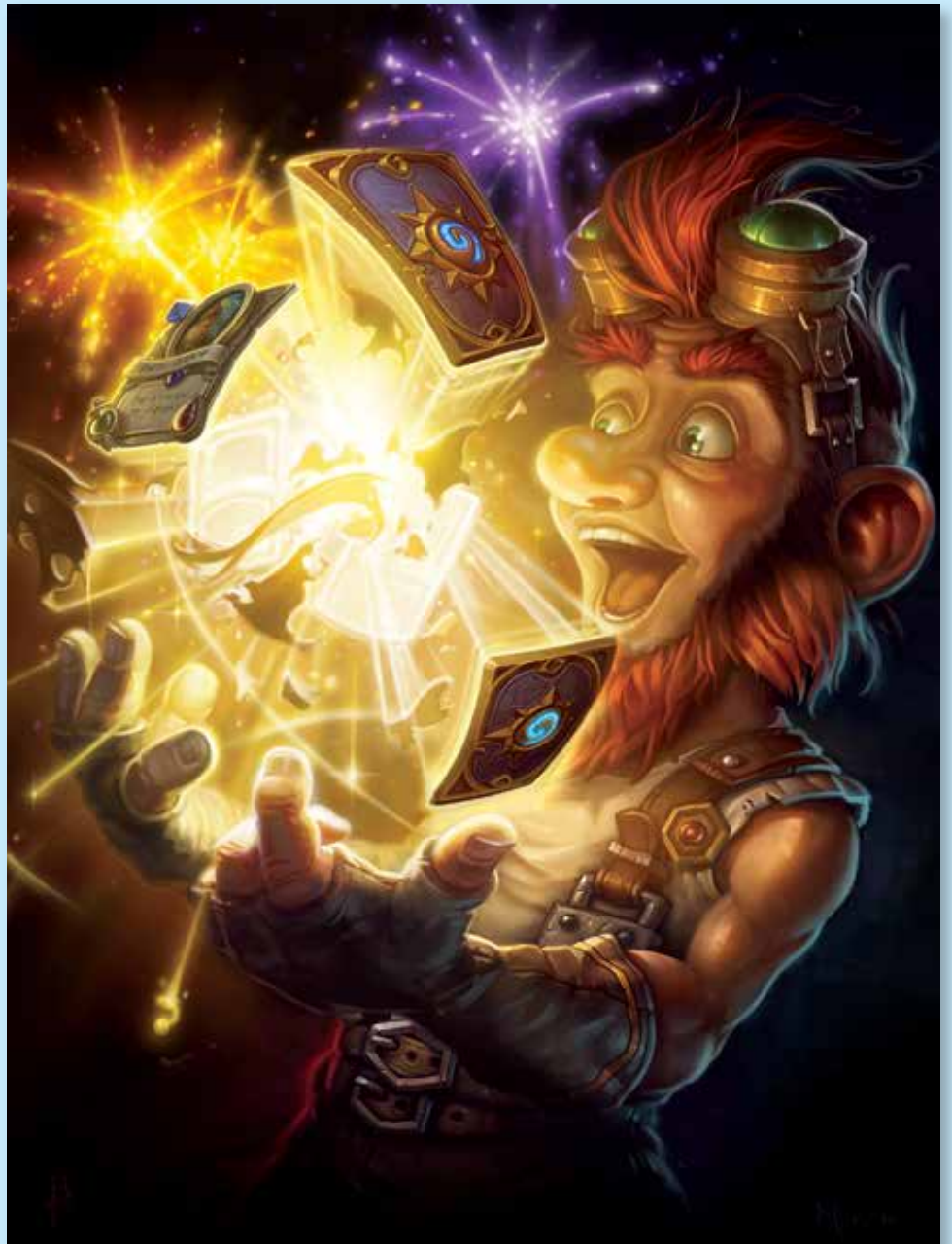
So you can imagine how excited Woo was to land a job at Blizzard—especially as the project he was a part of evolved into an extension of the *Warcraft* universe. "When I had this opportunity to work on *Hearthstone*," Woo says, "I was really excited to be part of opening a new window into the *World of Warcraft*—maybe make it more accessible to people who are less hardcore by focusing on making it a game for everyone." Which is interesting considering that *Hearthstone* was not originally created to be part of *WoW*.

### Origins

It's true. The original assignment had nothing whatsoever to do with *World of Warcraft*. "Blizzard wanted to spin up a new team that could work on projects that weren't quite as huge," says Woo. The mandate that Blizzard gave this team "was to stay small, lean, fast, and make a really exciting Blizzard-quality game that is epic—but not epic in scope."

Many on the team had been fans of collectible card games for years, so they started developing ideas in that genre. As *Hearthstone* began to take shape, the team realized that it was a natural fit for the *World of Warcraft* universe.







# Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft





### Going a Little Crazy

An important aspect of the *World of Warcraft* universe is the various locations players can visit, and *Hearthstone's* battlefields now feel like an extension of that universe—but with their own distinct visual style. “We’ve sometimes done play-throughs of a specific *WoW* dungeon so that everyone knows exactly the feel of that dungeon,” says Dodd. “Then the artists go a little crazy and come up with all kinds of cool ideas and put in whatever they want.

As long as the focus isn’t being pulled out of the game field and as long things are still physical and not too intrusive into the game field, they pretty much get to do whatever cool things they come up with.”

“Crazy” does have its limitations, of course—particularly when seeking to design a collectible card games with a balanced deck. Dodds explains: “The biggest challenge is that we’re looking at creating these new cards and we have to look at them from a ton of different directions

in order to make sure they are fulfilling the needs of the games.” When examining a single card, for example, the team always considered the following: “Does it have the right flavor? Is it an interesting card to play? At its current rarity, is it going to be available enough to players? Is it going to have problems in arena? When players read this card will they know what is going to happen? All of these different factors that have to come together to form an awesome deck of cards.”

### Universal Appeal

*Hearthstone* has been well received by players the world over—as it was intended. “When we made *Hearthstone* we wanted a game that could be played by everybody,” Woo says. “There are some regional differences—like in Korea more players tend to play in internet game rooms—but overall, everyone is having a good time playing the game.”

There was a brief concern that the International eSports Federation, which was hosting a tournament, did not originally allow women to play *Hearthstone* in the competition. While the Federation changed this policy, it still upset those who worked on the game. “It is super important for us on the *Hearthstone* team to have a very inclusive environment, and we want everyone to play the game,” Dodds says. “When we are working with partners we’re talking to them to make sure they are sharing our same goal of inclusiveness.”

Meanwhile, that quest for a global audience has created challenges internally because Blizzard’s infrastructure still divides the world into distinct gaming regions—an approach that prevents truly global game-play. “We looked at various solutions to attempt to have the world play on the same server,” Woo says, “but for *Hearthstone* it was not easy for us to create a situation where





# Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft



it's a global region and at the same time let everyone have a good experience."

Part of the issue is the immense popularity of Blizzard's games. "If we don't segregate out by the four regions, it's not possible for us to find an off-peak time to go offline. It has contributed to this idea that at least for now, the way we are set up, it is best for our players if we divide the world into four regions so that we can do maintenance during off-peak hours and still continue to give our players a good experience."

## Refinements

The success of a game like *Hearthstone* depends heavily on the team's ability to refine it over time. Analytics are key. "We're certainly getting information in a bunch of different ways," Dodds says. "Internally we follow the stats about which cards are doing well and what classes are doing well, and we pay attention to that as far as what's powerful and what's not across

different skill levels—what power levels look like for rank 1 players versus rank 10 players versus rank 20 players."

In addition to the expected use of statistical data provided by the game, the team also pays attention to *Hearthstone's* forums. "There's the empirical data of which card is super powerful, but at the same time there is the emotional data like players being frustrated over playing against a specific card."

Dodds and Woo are proud that *Hearthstone* has found an audience that includes casual gamers, hardcore gamers, and old-school collectible card players. "I have hardcore gamer friends with whom I play shooters, and my wife plays casual games," Woo says, "and we finally have a game where I'm actually playing it with my hardcore gamer friends and my wife."

As for the future, Dodd says that the team's long term goal is to continue "making a game that we continue to love. And I can safely say that we continue to think this game is awesome. I don't know if there is anything larger than that." ❄





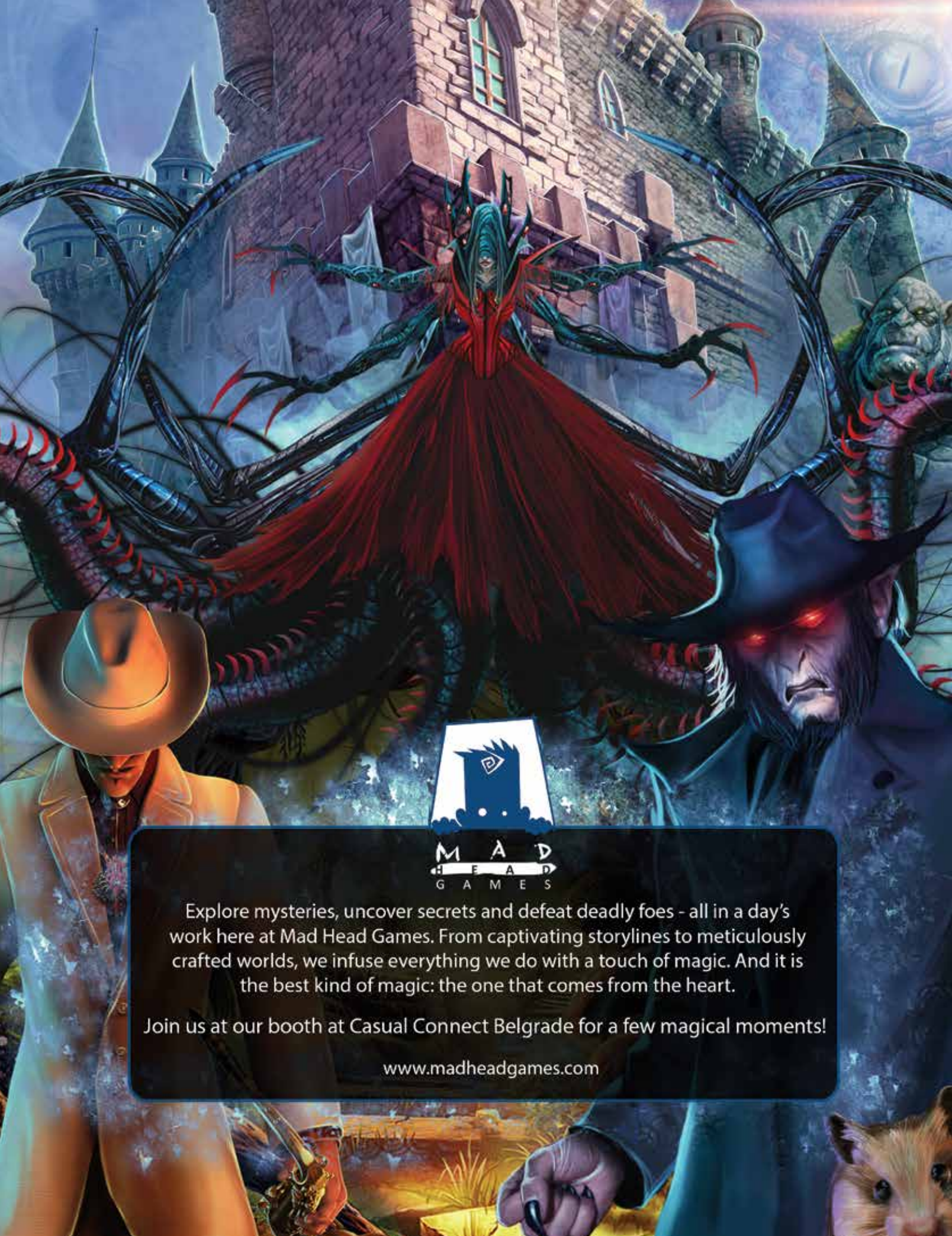
**WE KNOW  
PAYMENTS.**

**WE KNOW  
GAMES.**



[WWW.SAFECHARGE.COM](http://WWW.SAFECHARGE.COM)





Explore mysteries, uncover secrets and defeat deadly foes - all in a day's work here at Mad Head Games. From captivating storylines to meticulously crafted worlds, we infuse everything we do with a touch of magic. And it is the best kind of magic: the one that comes from the heart.

Join us at our booth at Casual Connect Belgrade for a few magical moments!

[www.madheadgames.com](http://www.madheadgames.com)